GENESISシリーズ
境界線上のホライゾン
きみとあさまで 上
川上稔
イラスト・さとやす（TENKY）

特-1

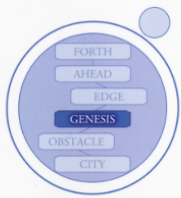
GENESISシリーズ 境界線上のホライゾン

きみとあさまでI〈上〉

川上 稔

特典文庫

BCXA 0404



The 1st.GENESIS

NOT FOR SALE

かわかみ みのる
川上 稔

1974年1月3日生まれ。東京出身。「特典小説はバンドネタで軽くいきますかー」→当初の予定を大幅に超えた原稿を書き上げ担当編集とバンダイビジュアルを泣かす。「まだまだ書けますー」とは本人の談……。

【特典文庫】
GENESISシリーズ境界線上のホライゾン
きみとあさまで I〈上〉

【電撃文庫】
GENESISシリーズ
境界線上のホライゾン I〈上〉〈中〉
境界線上のホライゾン II〈上〉〈中〉
境界線上のホライゾン III〈上〉〈中〉〈下〉
境界線上のホライゾン IV〈上〉〈中〉〈下〉

イラスト:さとやす(TENKY)

山形生まれの栃木育ち「チョコかけ全粒粉クッキーおいしい。やんちゃな全粒粉を見事に押さえ付けるチョコ師匠」ブルボナーときましたか先生。

© 川上稔／アスキー・メディアワークス／境界線上のホライゾン製作委員会

カバー／旭印刷

inside story

『浅間の朝まで』

最近、朝の水垢離を浅間神社の泉で行いながら、浅間は一つの事実を確信していた。
人体と浮力の関係だ。一年次くらいから自覚はあったが、二年の今年で確信に変わった。
自分は浮く側の人間だ。
しかし、これは物理的な問題なので、誰しも当然の事であろう。
だが、あまり観察した事が無いから解らないのだが、浮くのは自分のだけという事は無いだろうか。神道の契約関係で、ダイエット系のを入れてるフシもある。
……ひょっとして他の人のは、水に入ると、ズゴォン！　とか沈むのかもしれません。
ちょっと寝不足で頭が働いてないもするが、近似値の人間に聞いてみよう。
「喜美？　あの、ちょっと聞いてみたいんですけど――浮きます？」
「何が？　気分？　テンション？　それとも勢い？」
それ全部同じ。だが、流石に胸がどうとか、水垢離中に言って神道ヨゴレメーターを跳ね上げるのは避けたい。だから浅間は言葉を選んで、
「ええと、――人体の一部です。水垢離中なんであんまり変な事言えませんけど」
「まあねぇ。でも、浮くって？　……女にとって大事な、出っ張ってるところ？」
通じたらしい。だから浅間は泉の中で頷き、
「あ、はいはい、そうです」

「――Ｊｕｄ、大体解ったわ。で、確認のために聞くけど、それがどうしたの？」
「いや、私の、思いがけず浮くんで、喜美とかどうなんでしょうか、って思いまして」
「アンタの⁉　浮くの⁉」
「浮きますよう？　今、リアルタイムで浮いてますけど」
「ちょ、ちょっと待ちなさい！　浅間神社の泉ね⁉　すぐダッシュするわ！」
表示枠の向こうで、愚弟！　と彼を呼ぶ声がする。
「ちょっと愚弟、シミュレートするから鍋に水張って突っ込みなさい！　浅間が朝からチンコ生やして泉に浮かせて遊んでるから、アンタ現場で〝ほうら首長竜〟って対抗するのよ！」
「し、してませんよそんな事‼　何ですかその飛躍！　胸の事ですよ！」
「え？　一部出っ張りって言ったじゃない、一部って！　――オバイなら一部よ！」
「うわ、腹立ちますけど確かに負けた気が……」
「フフ、――馬鹿な子ねえ」
どっちが！　と朝から血圧上げていると、彼の声が聞こえてきた。
「あー。試してみたけど浮かねえぞフフー！　――何で姉ちゃん密気入れ持って来るんだよ！」
向こうは向こうで相変わらず騒々しいようだ。
ともあれ、温水槽能つかないかな、と、浅間はやや冷えた頭と身体でそう思う。

inside story

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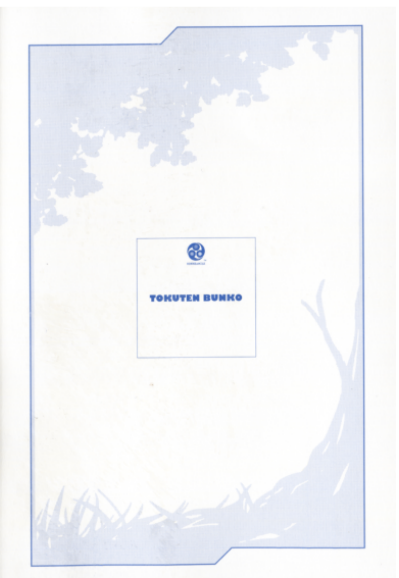


●Outline●

In the distant future, history is being recreated in the limited territory left to mankind.

In the year 1647 of the Testament calendar, the Testament, a manual for the recreation of history, has stopped updating, and a period of time known as the Apocalypse deepens. Meanwhile, in the Far East, the people live their lives while filled with anxiety and worry for the future.

The Musashi, an aerial city ship that moves about the Far East, has traveled from Mikawa, through Osaka, and to its next port, Aki and Itsukushima. Aki is the headquarters of K.P.A. Italia. And in the sky above the Seto Inland Sea, the students of Musashi and Aki will hold a gagaku festival as a part of the spring academy festival.

Asama Tomo, one of Musashi's students and the only daughter of the Asama Shrine, is a shrine maiden and a second year in Musashi Ariadust Academy. Her breasts and height are both impressive, but she pays little attention to that fact. Those with plenty are oblivious to their good fortune. However, she does have a certain thought. She is wondering whether she should begin playing something more removed from Shinto gagaku at this gagaku festival.

Asama is a diligent girl. A large-breasted childhood friend causes a lot of problems, but she lives a proper life. But it all began when a quick comment from a certain idiot made her think she should change her usual self.

"I wonder what he would say if I told him I was starting a band."

After all, she had always been a gagaku-focused archery-obsessed purifying shrine maiden who no one could hope to oppose. A pop song? Singing about love or being in love? That was ridiculous. But it was true she had a lot of music on black disks...

What was she supposed to do?

And so she will be joined by her dancing and singing friends, the large-breasted Aoi Kimi and the flat Nate Mitotsudaira, for the beginning of many twists and turns.

As they run into the members of the '47 student council or chancellor's officers, a mysterious automaton with no memories who boarded the ship at Mikawa, and other irregular beings, Asama will occasionally realize she has started shooting without realizing it, but from now on she will be in control of her own life. Maybe.

Inside Story

Asama's Morning

Lately, while performing the morning water purification of Asama Shrine's spring, Asama had confirmed a certain fact.

It had to do with the buoyancy of the human body. She had been vaguely aware since her first year, but she was sure of it now that she was in her second year.

She was the type of person who floated.

But that was a matter of physics and was perfectly normal.

However, she had never paid attention before, so she had to wonder if she was the only one. It may have had to do with the diet divine protection included in her Shinto contract.

…*Maybe other people sink like a rock when they get in the water.*

She was a little sleep deprived and felt she might not be thinking clearly, but she decided to ask someone with similar stats.

"Kimi? Um, I have a question. …Do you float?"

"In what way? Emotionally? Spiritually? Or do you mean my mood?"

Those were all the same thing, but Asama wanted to avoid saying she meant the breasts. Saying that during the water purification would send her Shinto impurity meter off the charts. So she chose her words more carefully.

"Um…I'm referring a part of the human body. I can't say anything too weird since I'm in the middle of my water purification."

"I suppose not. But float? …Is it something very important to women and does it stick out from the body?"

It sounded like Kimi had caught on, so Asama nodded in the spring.

“Yes, yes. That’s what I mean.”

“Judge. I think I get the picture. Now, just to be sure, what about it?”

“Well, I realized I float there, so I was wondering if you’re the same.”

“You!? Float there!?”

“I do. I’m watching it happen right now.”

“W-wait just a second! You’re in the Asama Shrine’s spring, right!? I’ll be right there!”

Through the sign frame, Asama heard her calling for her “foolish brother”.

“Come here, foolish brother! We need to simulate it, so fill a pot with water and stick it right in! Asama grew a penis this morning and she’s playing with it by making it float in the spring, so you need to go fight back with your ‘look, it’s a plesiosaur’ gag!”

“I-I did not grow one of those!! Where did that come from!? I was talking about my breasts!”

“Eh? But you said it was *a* part that sticks out. *A* part! The boobs are two parts!”

“Ugh. That really pisses me off, but I can’t argue against that!”

“Heh heh. What a silly girl.”

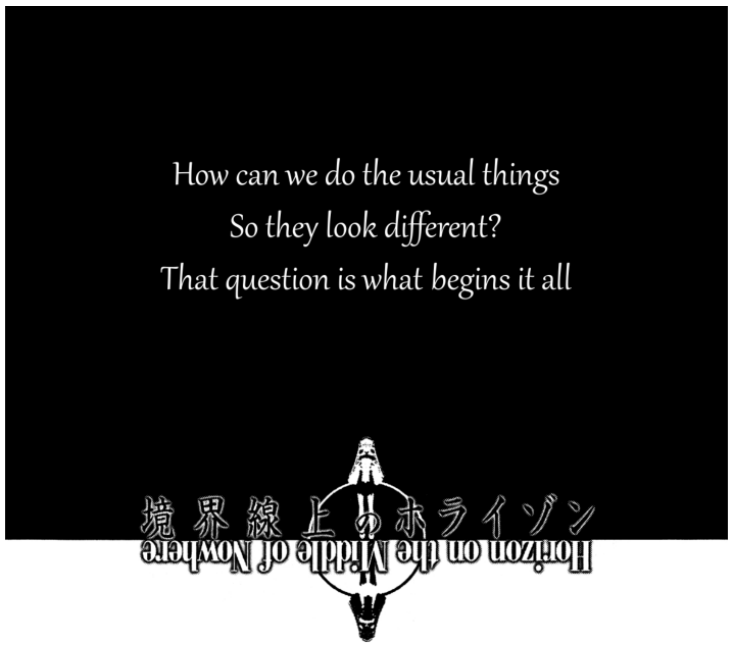
“*I’m* the silly one!?” she shouted with her blood pressure rising so early in the morning, but then she heard his voice.

“Hey, I just tried it and it doesn’t float at all. …Sis, why are you carrying over an air pump!?”

It seemed those two were as lively as ever.

At any rate, Asama's chilled head began to wonder if the spring had a water heating function.

Title Page


How can we do the usual things
So they look different?
That question is what begins it all
境界線上のホライゾン
Horizon on the Middle of Nowhere

Kimitoasamade

Prologue "The Three Girls of the Asama Shrine" ··· P11
Chapter 1 "High Altitude Performer" ····· P49
Chapter 2 "Chicks at Home" ····· P91

I
A

Kawakami Minoru
Illustrations: Satoyasu (TENKY)
Design: Watanabe Kouichi (2725 Inc)

How can we do the usual things

So they look different?

That question is what begins it all

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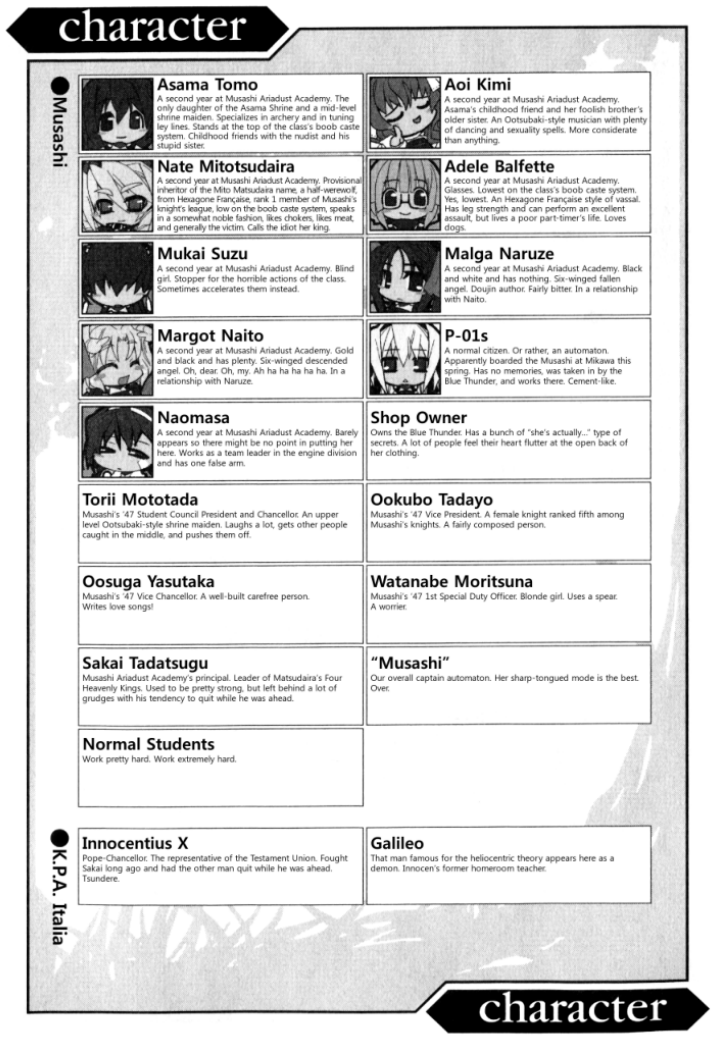
Characters


character
●Musashi
Asama Tomo
A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. The only daughter of the Asama Shrine and a mid-level shrine maiden. Specializes in archery and in tuning ley lines. Stands at the top of the class's boob caste system. Childhood friends with the nudist and his stupid sister.
Aoi Kimi
A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Asama's childhood friend and her foolish brother's older sister. An Ootsubaki-style musician with plenty of dancing and sexuality spells. More considerate than anything.
Nate Mitotsudaira
A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Provisional inheritor of the Mito Matsudaira name, a half-werewolf, from Hexagone Française, rank 1 member of Musashi's knight's league, low on the boob caste system, speaks in a somewhat noble fashion, likes chokers, likes meat, and generally the victim. Calls the idiot her king.
Adele Balfette
A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Glasses. Lowest on the class's boob caste system. Yes, lowest. An Hexagone Française style of vassal. Has leg strength and can perform an excellent assault, but lives a poor part-timer's life. Loves dogs.
Mukai Suzu
A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Blind girl. Stopper for the horrible actions of the class. Sometimes accelerates them instead.
Malga Naruze
A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Black and white and has nothing. Six-winged fallen angel. Doujin author. Fairly bitter. In a relationship with Naito.
Margot Naito
A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Gold and black and has plenty. Six-winged descended angel. Oh, dear. Oh, my. Ah ha ha ha ha ha. In a relationship with Naruze.
P-01s
A normal citizen. Or rather, an automaton. Apparently boarded the Musashi at Mikawa this spring. Has no memories, was taken in by the Blue Thunder, and works there. Cement-like.
Naomasa
A second year at Musashi Ariadust Academy. Barely appears so there might be no point in putting her here. Works as a team leader in the engine division and has one false arm.
Shop Owner
Owns the Blue Thunder. Has a bunch of "she's actually..." type of secrets. A lot of people feel their heart flutter at the open back of her clothing.
Torii Mototada
Musashi's '47 Student Council President and Chancellor. An upper level Ootsubaki-style shrine maiden. Laughs a lot, gets other people caught in the middle, and pushes them off.
Ookubo Tadayo
Musashi's '47 Vice President. A female knight ranked fifth among Musashi's knights. A fairly composed person.
Oosuga Yasutaka
Musashi's '47 Vice Chancellor. A well-built carefree person. Writes love songs!
Watanabe Moritsuna
Musashi's '47 1st Special Duty Officer. Blonde girl. Uses a spear. A worrier.
Sakai Tadatsugu
Musashi Ariadust Academy's principal. Leader of Matsudaira's Four Heavenly Kings. Used to be pretty strong, but left behind a lot of grudges with his tendency to quit while he was ahead.
"Musashi"
Our overall captain automaton. Her sharp-tongued mode is the best. Over.
Normal Students
Work pretty hard. Work extremely hard.
●K.P.A. Italia
Innocentius X
Pope-Chancellor. The representative of the Testament Union. Fought Sakai long ago and had the other man quit while he was ahead. Tsundere.
Galileo
That man famous for the heliocentric theory appears here as a demon. Innocen's former homeroom teacher.
character

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● **K.P.A. Italia**

- Innocentius X: Pope-Chancellor. The representative of the Testament Union. Fought Sakai long ago and had the other man quit while he was ahead. Tsundere.
- Galileo: That man famous for the heliocentric theory appears here as a demon. Innocen's former homeroom teacher.

Glossary

F

•**Far East:** Name of the Divine States after the Harmonic Unification War.

G

•**God of War:** A giant humanoid machine that people combine with to move.
•**Graduation:** No limit for nations other than the Far East. Far Easterners must graduate at 18.

H

•**Harmonic Territory:** Locations where the fallen Harmonic World Divine States unified with the real world while breaking apart.
•**Harmonic Unification War:** A war between the harmonic world residents and the real world (Divine States) residents after the destruction of the harmonic world. The harmonic world residents won and began a provisional rule over the Divine States.
•**Harmonic World:** A former alternate space that copied the Divine States. Preserved through ley line control.
•**Hexagone Française:** Mouri clan + France.
•**History Recreation:** Recreating the Testament descriptions to maintain the path the world takes.

I

•**Inherited Name:** The name of a historical figure given to an appropriate individual for the history recreation.
•**Internal Blessings:** blessings stored within oneself.
•**IZUMO:** The Far East's largest corporation. The headquarters for Far Eastern shrines and the corporation that built the Musashi.

J

•**Judge/Judgment:** Means "understood". Used by criminals.

K

•**K.P.A. Italia:** Association of Aki States + Union of Italian City States.

L

•**Ley Line:** The thicker of the pathways through which ether flows.

A

•**Academy:** An educational facility. Used as the center of political and military power. Tend to have many branch schools.
•**Academy Rules:** The basic laws upheld between academies. Agreed to by the Testament Union.
•**Apocalypse:** The end of the world. 1648 when the Testament's history descriptions end.
•**ATELL:** The smallest unit of ether. Used for spells.

B

•**Blessings:** The amount of ether needed for a human to exist for one hour. 3600 ATELL. Conversion unit for a spell's ATELL consumption.

C

•**Catholic:** The old mainstream version of Tsirhc.
•**Chancellor's Officers:** An organization led by the chancellor which leads the academy and performs work such as defense.
•**Contradiction Allowance:** The foundational ability of the world. Allows the simultaneous existence of all sorts of physical laws.

D

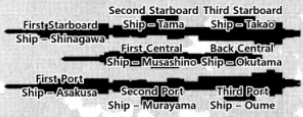
•**Divine States:** Former name of the Far East.
•**Divine Weapon:** A weapon that, unlike a normal weapon, has a unique ability.

E

•**Emperor:** A divine individual who is said to control the ley lines using the Imperial Regalia in Kyou. Does not interfere with the world.
•**England:** Uses a floating island and does not control any Far Eastern land or Far Eastern daimyo.
•**Ether:** Component that makes up contradiction-allowing space.
•**Ether Engine:** An engine that uses ether's space-altering ability. The effect changes based on the internal crest.
•**Ether Fuel:** Ether that has been purified into fuel. Used as External Blessings or for ether engines.
•**Ether Reactor:** A reactor that extracts and purifies ether from the air. Has a lower output than a ley line reactor, but is relatively safe.
•**External Blessings:** Blessings accumulated outside of oneself. Ether fuel is an example.

words

•**Shirasago Enterprises:** IZUMO's shrine brand.



•**Sign Frame:** Spell device needed to use each religion's basic protection.
•**Spell:** Causing a miracle in a certain space by processing ether.
•**Student Council:** The organization that handles an academy's domestic and foreign affairs.
•**Substitution:** Offering something to please a god instead of using Blessings to activate a spell.

T

•**Tes/Testament:** Means "understood".
•**Testament:** A history book that provides the history of the earth's previous age. There are seven pairs and excerpts.
•**Testament Descriptions:** History of the earth's previous age that is automatically updated by the Testament. However, it stopped updating after the description for 1648.
•**Testament Union:** An organization meant to lead the history recreation.
•**Tres España:** Oouchi and Ootomo clans + Spain. Currently includes Portugal.
•**Tsirhc:** A religion which places the Son of God at the top. Worships the Testament.

M

•**Magic:** Folk spells currently under persecution in Europe.
•**M.H.R.R.:** Hashiba clan + Holy Roman Empires.
•**Mikawa:** Destroyed by the collapse of Lord Motonobu's ley line reactor.
•**Mlasi:** A later non-Tsirhc religion that also worships the Testament.
•**Mouse:** A spirit beast device to act as an intermediary between the Shinto religion and its musicians. Other religions use different names.
•**Musashi:** Aerial city ship. The sole independent territory allowed for the Far East.
•**Musashi Ariadust Academy:** The Far East's representative academy which exists on Okutama of Musashi.
•**Musician:** A religion's worshiper.

O

•**Offering:** Providing a god with something they will enjoy or Internal Blessings.
•**Orei Metallo/Nero:** Ore or water containing ether. Can be used as ether fuel.

P

•**P.A. Oda:** Oda clan + Ottomans.
•**Protestant:** A new style of Tsirhc created to escape the corruption of Catholicism and to adjust to the new age.

R

•**Religion:** Organizations or groups that worship a god or the Testament.

S

•**Shinto:** Far Eastern religion. Worships the Far Eastern gods and uses divine music spells.

●Asama's Plans●

"Sis! Sis! What are you and Asama going to do!?"

"Heh heh heh. Well, the Musashi just arrived at the floating island of Itsukushima. To prepare for the spring academy festival's gagaku festival, we'll be tuning the ley lines on the theatre ship. And in shrine maiden outfits!!"

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D

- Divine States: Former name of the Far East.
- Divine Weapon: A weapon that, unlike a normal weapon, has a unique ability.

E

- Emperor: A divine individual who is said to control the ley lines using the Imperial Regalia in Kyou. Does not interfere with the world.
- England: Uses a floating island and does not control any Far Eastern land or Far Eastern daimyo.
- Ether: Component that makes up contradiction-allowing space.
- Ether Engine: An engine that uses ether's space-altering ability. The effect changes based on the internal crest.
- Ether Fuel: Ether that has been purified into fuel. Used as External Blessings or for ether engines.
- Ether Reactor: A reactor that extracts and purifies ether from the air. Has a lower output than a ley line reactor, but is relatively safe.
- External Blessings: Blessings accumulated outside of oneself. Ether fuel is an example.

F

- Far East: Name of the Divine States after the Harmonic Unification War.

G

- God of War: A giant humanoid machine that people combine with to move.
- Graduation: No limit for nations other than the Far East. Far Easterners must graduate at 18.

H

- Harmonic Territory: Locations where the fallen Harmonic World Divine States unified with the real world while breaking apart.
- Harmonic Unification War: A war between the harmonic world residents and the real world (Divine States) residents after the destruction of the harmonic world. The harmonic world residents won and began a provisional rule over the Divine States.
- Harmonic World: A former alternate space that copied the Divine States. Preserved through ley line control.
- Hexagone Française: Mouri clan + France.
- History Recreation: Recreating the Testament descriptions to maintain the path the world takes.

I

- Inherited Name: The name of a historical figure given to an appropriate individual for the history recreation.
- Internal Blessings: blessings stored within oneself.
- IZUMO: The Far East's largest corporation. The headquarters for Far Eastern shrines and the corporation that built the Musashi.

J

- Judge/Judgment: Means “understood”. Used by criminals.

K

- K.P.A. Italia: Association of Aki States + Union of Italian City States.

L

- Ley Line: The thicker of the pathways through which ether flows.

M

- Magic: Folk spells currently under persecution in Europe.
- M.H.R.R.: Hashiba clan + Holy Roman Empires.
- Mikawa: Destroyed by the collapse of Lord Motonobu's ley line reactor.
- Mlasi: A later non-Tsirhc religion that also worships the Testament.
- Mouse: A spirit beast device to act as an intermediary between the Shinto religion and its musicians. Other religions use different names.
- Musashi: Aerial city ship. The sole independent territory allowed for the Far East.

[First Starboard Ship – Shinagawa/Second Starboard Ship – Tama/Third Starboard Ship – Takao/First Central Ship – Musashino/Back Central Ship – Okutama/First Port Ship – Asakusa/Second Port Ship – Murayama/Third Port Ship – Oume]

- Musashi Ariadust Academy: The Far East's representative academy which exists on Okutama of Musashi.
- Musician: A religion's worshiper.

O

- Offering: Providing a god with something they will enjoy or Internal Blessings.
- Orei Metallo/Nero: Ore or water containing ether. Can be used as ether fuel.

P

- P.A. Oda: Oda clan + Ottomans.
- Protestant: A new style of Tsirhc created to escape the corruption of Catholicism and to adjust to the new age.

R

- Religion: Organizations or groups that worship a god or the Testament.

S

- Shinto: Far Eastern religion. Worships the Far Eastern gods and uses divine music spells.
- Shirasago Enterprises: IZUMO's shrine brand.
- Sign Frame: Spell device needed to use each religion's basic protection.
- Spell: Causing a miracle in a certain space by processing ether.
- Student Council: The organization that handles an academy's domestic and foreign affairs.
- Substitution: Offering something to please a god instead of using Blessings to activate a spell.

T

- Tes/Testament: Means “understood”.
- Testament: A history book that provides the history of the earth’s previous age. There are seven pairs and excerpts.
- Testament Descriptions: History of the earth’s previous age that is automatically updated by the Testament. However, it stopped updating after the description for 1648.
- Testament Union: An organization meant to lead the history recreation.
- Tres España: Oouchi and Ootomo clans + Spain. Currently includes Portugal.
- Tsirhc: A religion which places the Son of God at the top. Worships the Testament.

Asama's Plans

Toori: Sis! Sis! What are you and Asama going to do!?

Kimi: Heh heh heh. Well, the Musashi just arrived at the floating island of Itsukushima. To prepare for the spring academy festival's gagaku festival, we'll be tuning the ley lines on the theatre ship. And in shrine maiden outfits!!

Opening

Recently, a certain thought came to Asama whenever she left for work.

It occurred to her as she prepared for the spring academy festival, the first school festival since she had entered the second year.

…I wonder if it would be okay for me to join a band and play music up on the stage…

She was the successor to the Asama Shrine and she played gagaku as a part of her work there.

Gagaku was normal.

It was part of what was required of her.

She felt music offered up to her god was divine and incredibly meaningful.

So in the past, she had thought of any other music as removed from the rules set by her god and thus impure.

That showed her awareness that she was the successor to the Asama Shrine.

But the god her friend worshipped was extremely liberal when it came to song, dance, and music. They were both Shinto gods, but that friend had shown her singing and dancing that was unrestrained yet not impure.

She had found it amazing.

Also, her friends from other nations could freely play music with instruments and rules Asama knew nothing about.

And she lived on an aerial city ship known as the Musashi, so she travelled around the different nations of the Far East. Each time she

saw the state of another nation's music or how they sought out music, she was filled with silent surprise.

She may have had her god's rules, but most of the world existed *outside of those rules*.

This was not limited to music. She also saw it in art, cooking, clothing, and customs.

But Asama had gagaku, so the conflicting music of other nations and other gods felt strange to her.

But which one of them was truly strange?

Once she and her friends had entered middle school, their heights and body shapes had changed. Differences had appeared in their interests and use of makeup.

She had realized on a few occasions that she could be a little strict.

"I really am strict…or meaninglessly diligent…"

She understood that she could be conservative in order to preserve her proper lifestyle as a shrine maiden.

By maintaining her normal life and her normal self, she could maintain most of what it meant to be a shrine maiden. But…

"Isn't there anything else I can do?"

She even sighed.

If it had been about clothes, she would have given up because having clothes made cost money. She did not need to borrow money for clothes because her shrine maiden outfit was popular enough already. As for cooking…

…Yes, I would gain weight. Everyone knows the best foods make you gain weight. And art requires specific tools. I guess music is the same in that regard, but…

Everyone listened to music, so it was something other than fashion and hobbies that anyone could talk about.

In middle school, a lot of people had started working part-time afterschool and they quickly gained an environment in which to listen to music.

Asama could make music with her gagaku, but the popular music seemed “strange” to her.

The shrine had plenty of musical instruments. Those instruments were made to interfere with ether, so they were all amazingly extraordinary products that could not be used for normal purposes. She had not realized that until she brought one to middle school and caused a huge commotion.

However, she had never played a pop song. She knew she could, but she had not.

She had protected her gagaku. It was her job and it was important to her god, so she had ignored all else.

But three things had helped change her mind in high school.

First, non-gagaku music was played at the high school festival even though it was officially known as a gagaku festival. The Asama Shrine had to manage the Musashi’s ether, so she had attended the festival.

Second, her familiarity with gagaku from her work at the shrine had given her an excellent understanding of the musical scale and methods of playing string instruments, so she could produce exactly the sounds she wanted.

And third, at the end of her first year, *he* had told her something while she cleaned up after the year-end music festival.

“Are you ever gonna play in a band like that?”

…What am I supposed to do about this?

What had she said back then?

Had it been: “No, I have my work at the shrine.”

Or had it been: “P-pop songs and gagaku are completely different.”

No, maybe it had been: “I-I couldn’t even if I tried.”

…I feel like it might have been all of them.

She sighed in her heart and had another thought.

…I do want to try it, but there are so many problems there.

For example:

“I would have to find some other band members, but I’m so bad about taking action on my own…”

She wished her class could force her into it or that *he* would drag her into it like usual, but reality was not that convenient.

So Asama ended up watching her classmates and upperclassmen getting ready while she stayed in her usual spot as the “supervisor”.

This was her usual self and the usual scene.

Nothing was going to change like this, but…

“I don’t really have a choice.”

Her life was never going to change on this aerial city ship.

They would continue to live “like always” as they flew above the provisionally ruled Far East.

…Yeah.

And once more, she arrived at the preparation site.

“Now, then.”

She breathed in and spoke to begin her normal, set-in-stone life.

“Asama Shrine will now perform the ether tuning for Theatre Ship

Tanigawa Castle!”

Prologue: The Three Girls of the Asama Shrine

PROLOGUE
"The Three Girls of the Asama Shrine"
How in the world
Can we work so well together
When we're talking about
Completely different things?
Point Allocation (Practice, maybe?)

How in the world

Can we work so well together

When we're talking about

Completely different things?

Point Allocation (Practice, maybe?)

"Hey, Asama, how is the wiring over there going? Did you jam everything inside? Oh, c'mon, I mean into the hole! You wrap it around like this, gather it all together like a tentacle, and…! Ahhhn! Th-the cable is all wrapped around me! H-how dirty! …Hey, you aren't even looking, Asama! Neither are you, Mitotsudaira! Oh? Why are you giving me that look of scorn while I'm lying boneless on the floor with a cable wrapped around me!? Are you leaving me like this!? Are you!? Because that's wonderful too!"

A black-haired shrine maiden sighed into the early summer sky as a strange girl writhed on the floor with a hemp rope cable wrapped around her.

They were on a ship in the sky, but…

"Kimi… This is the theatre ship and not the Musashi, plus a lot of the third years are here, so try not to play around so much."

The nametag on her neck hard point said "Asama Shrine: Asama Tomo" and she crouched in front of the girl whose nametag said "Asama Shrine: Aoi Kimi".

Asama lightly tapped a few times on the waist hard point of Kimi's mostly black shrine maiden outfit.

"Can you untangle yourself? This cable is for our work, so we can't cut it."

"What are you talking about!? I'm having fun playing tentacles and I need to think about what options I would have if this were a porn game, so don't interrupt! Or do you want to join in!? You do, don't you!? But there's no room, so you can't! Jealous, aren't you!?"

"I am a little jealous of that side of your personality. Yes."

Another girl in a mostly blue shrine maiden outfit stepped up alongside Asama. Her Asama Shrine nametag said “Nate Mitotsudaira”, she crouched down in front of Kimi, and she clearly started to say something, but…

“No, never mind. This is Kimi, so it’s no use.”

“Heh heh. Now, you’ve said it! You admit defeat, don’t you!? Surrender to me and I’m willing to trim you in Asama’s bath every night! But not now; I’m tentacling!”

“Why does she never get tired of herself?”

“It’s true! It’s so true!” shouted the crazy person as Asama and Mitotsudaira stood up.

Mitotsudaira sighed and spoke to Kimi.

“Listen, Kimi. We are trying to prepare for the Joint Gagaku Festival with Aki’s Itsukushima Shrine. The third years are doing most of it, but second years like us were called in to tune the stage for the Asama Shrine. So can’t you show some restraint?”

Mitotsudaira pointed to their surroundings.

As her hand swept around, it indicated third years in summer uniforms and light gods of war preparing for the Gagaku Festival. They were pulling back the floor in places, pulling out the tuners like pillars, and then tuning them.

It was the standard scene of Gagaku Festival preparations.

The occasional amplified instrument was heard for tuning or testing purposes, but the note would vanish into the sky.

Asama spoke with her hair fluttering in the wind.

“The ship’s auditory control spell hasn’t been activated yet, so all the sounds end up dead. As a theatre ship, it will have better acoustics than a concert hall when fully activated.”

Asama and Mitotsudaira looked around at the wooden plaza

floating in the sky.

The deck being longer front to back was characteristic of the theatre ships used for plays and Gagaku. The ship was also used for diplomacy, it had a stage on the bow, and tiered seats were prepared near the center.

“Also…”

Two main things were visible beyond the ship.

One was the Far East and the eastern end of the Seto Inland Sea. The other was the giant island floating in the western sky.

A giant torii stood in a manmade ocean on the east side of that floating island, but beyond the shrine and forest were a stone city and a European cathedral.

Asama sounded relieved when she saw that scenery.

“We made it to Aki, headquarters of K.P.A. Italia, this year too.”

Asama could see Aki, which was a floating island and the K.P.A. Italia headquarters of Itsukushima.

Their ship was in the sky three kilometers east of Aki.

It was an early summer afternoon and all of Aki was visible with the sun shining on it from above. The island was longer from north to south. The forested land was surrounded by ocean and a pathway of small torii. A large torii and shrine were visible on the eastern edge where the morning sun would reach them.

…It sure is big.

Because K.P.A. Italia took care of it, its equipment was cutting edge.

Mitotsudaira looked in the same direction next to Asama.

“That’s the headquarters of the Tsirhc religion that uses the

Testament as its scriptures and the effective leader of the Testament Union. Look at all those trade ships… They're showing off."

"If our shrine had that much, we could do so much more…"

"Heh heh heh. I don't want to hear that from the daughter of a shady shrine with plenty of underground equipment and sales deals! You should expand into other industries. You could do a lot with custom spells and divine makeup."

"That kind of thing is in a legal gray area, so we can't exactly make it standard…"

A shadow of some trade ships passed overhead.

The fleet heading to Aki bore the emblem of the Konishi family.

They all had sign frames open on the back and sides which were running advertisements for the Konishi brand.

But that was not all. Musashi and Aki trade ships were moving back and forth below their ship and in the distant sky. Musashi had sent out a large transport ship that acted as a hub to trade with Shikoku and the opposite coast of the Seto Inland Sea.

The surrounding third years suddenly looked to Aki.

"This is going to be a hot and busy summer."

"I'm on the industrial committee and manage the ice rooms, so I'm actually going to be freezing…"

"Well, this is the last year we can do this kind of thing as students."

They laughed and suddenly all looked to the east.

"I wonder if Musashi will stop here next year too."

It was inside a stealth space, but the Musashi was in the eastern sky there.

Drawn by the third years, Asama also focused on the invisible

Musashi. Her false left eye, Konoha, showed her the giant ether reaction in the sky that indicated the Musashi's presence.

They were positioned between the giant ship and floating island.

And while between Musashi and Itsukushima, they technically counted as diplomats, but…

"The Torii family supplied this three hundred meter theatre ship called the Tanigawa Castle, so it's a shame it seems so small here."

As soon as Mitotsudaira said that, they heard a voice on the western deck.

A theatre ship from Aki was rising there.

It was shaped a little different from the Tanigawa Castle and its armor was made from cross-shaped panels. It was the Noh Stage, given to Itsukushima by Kure Manufacturing Divine Ship Industries via K.P.A. Italia.

The Far Eastern students of the Aki reservation were performing similar work on that other ship.

Some shouted and waved their hands to the others while some continued their work.

…Aki's reservation is full of life.

"We need to do our best too. …We have to support our upperclassmen."

Asama operated her sign frame to have the stage floor open up.

"We've finished the wiring for the preliminary activation, so let's get to work."

Asama opened a few sign frames, and in one of them…

"Help me out, Hanami."

“Coming out.”

Her Mouse, Hanami, clapped her hands and tumbled out from the sign frame.

At the same time, the floor in front of Asama moved.

The central panels of the stage floor automatically opened and revealed what lay below.

The third year Gagaku Festival workers on the stage let out impressed voices, but Asama did not hesitate even with those upperclassmen focused on her. As a shrine maiden who performed Shinto rituals in front of others, she was used to gathering attention.

At the moment, she was only focused on those playing their instruments or discussing their auditory spells.

Part of her felt jealous, but at the same time…

…Oh, that spell would sound even nicer with another lighter one added in!

She just about interrupted them as an expert, so she tried to calm herself.

“Phew.”

As she regulated her breathing, the opening floor came to a stop.

She and the other two girls were currently…

…In front of the ether tuner for the bow stage.

Several dozen pieces of the stage floor were stored away over a wide area. This exposed a dark blue block fifteen meters wide and thirty meters tall.

The ether tuner was known as the Divine Sound Home. That name was engraved into the center of the wedge like structure that was common in products of the IZUMO Conglomerate. They were about

to use the device to tune the ley lines in the surrounding space.

With the floor moved, Asama and Mitotsudaira stepped onto the tuner which was a step down from the surrounding stage.

The third years working on the stage gave them interested glances from a distance but never moved in close.

When she saw them, Kimi finally moved from the floor. She laughed, quietly wiggled her black shrine maiden outfit that was tangled in the hemp rope cable, and then sat up.

“Looks like they know this is a Shinto ritual. …Asama, that means this stage is yours.”

Asama’s heart skipped a beat at that.

Kimi was the sister of *him*, the one who had asked if she would join a band, so it was possible she had heard about it from him. But…

…Calm down, me.

This girl always acted like she was on stage, so she simply talked about other people like they were the same.

So Asama sighed in her heart and took a scolding tone.

“Listen, Kimi. This stage is for the Gagaku groups. I’m only tuning the surrounding ley lines and controlling the flow of ether. This is the shrine’s work,” she said. “Also, this ship belongs to the Student Council. Think of it as a place for students.”

“You take everything too seriously. You’re going to miss out.”

“O-on what?”

Does she know? she wondered, but Kimi only narrowed her eyes and laughed.

Then she stood up.

“You really are fun to tease.”

Kimi gave a single twist of her body and the hemp rope cable easily fell away. She then looked down at Asama from a step above.

“Now, when is it my turn, Asama? If I still have some time, can I show Aki to Uzy?”

“Oh, Kimi, you get set up in the center. Mito, a little help. …If we’re going to give Uzy a social studies lesson, we can get our work done here first and enjoy a reward as we do.”

“Judge.”

Mitotsudaira nodded and ran along with her heels sounding loudly on the top of the tuner.

“Um, will the one here work?”

When Mitotsudaira stopped and asked her question, Asama nodded and used a sign frame to open it up.

“Yes. Raise the edge of the tuner and then do the four counters in a diagonal line starting from there. …Oh, and by ‘there’, I mean the left…which would be your right.”

“Eh? Eh?”

After Asama apologized to the confused girl, a few large forms approached. Three light gods of war operated by students were walking over.

A staticky divine mail from the engine division appeared next to her face. It was from Naomasa.

“Need some help from the gods of war there? They’re technically supposed to be working on something else, but with your permission, I can get the higher ups to agree.”

“Thanks, but we should be fine with Mito here. That way we can use the purification equipment properly too. Thanks for the offer though, Masa.”

“Don’t worry about it. We’re helping out the Student Council and

Chancellor's Officers too. The Spring School Festival's Gagaku Festival is the first big job for the student council, so I just hope we're doing our part to help."

It was only text, but Asama could almost hear the smile in Naomasa's voice. The light gods of war raised a hand in greeting and then returned to their original work.

…This job is up to me. Or rather, I had them leave it to me.

I need to do it right, she thought while taking a breath and clapping her hands.

Asama, Mitotsudaira, and Kimi (who had stepped down onto the tuners) exchanged powerful looks and Asama spoke.

"The Asama Shrine's shrine maidens – Second Years Asama Tomo, Aoi Kimi, and Nate Mitotsudaira – will now tune the ley lines in this place of divine sound."

Mitotsudaira put on the glove hanging from her right waist hard point part.

The glove had a charm woven into it, so it lowered one's interference with ether. The formatted meter on the back of the hand indicated the amount used. That meter was currently a blank box, but…

…This isn't really made for someone like me.

She was a half-werewolf. Since werewolves were close to being spirits, an artifact that lowered ether interference clashed with her very being. Simply placing the glove on her right hand and tightening it caused the square meter to slowly fill with black from left to right. So…

"Tomo, make this quick."

Asama tossed a sign frame downward with a fingertip. As soon as it sank into the top of the tuner, she clapped once.

“Ah.”

Bluish-white veins of light filled the top surface and mold lines of the tuner. The light pulsed and moved from Asama to Mitotsudaira.

“Kyah!”

She quickly spread her legs because the upper bulkhead of the tuner’s edge had opened where she was standing.

A square space fifty centimeters across opened to reveal a torii-shaped handle and the top of a pillar continuing down.

The pillar was a ley line extraction container. In other words, it was the vessel to hold a god.

A torii-style sign frame appeared on top of the torii-shaped handle. An arrow drew a circle to tell her which way to turn it, so she leaned forward with her legs still spread.

“Now, then.”

When she grabbed the handle, light spilled from between it and the glove. Ether was leaking out.

Mitotsudaira knew this tuner’s role was to access a god.

…The god is called into the container by the music and festival, which tunes the surrounding area.

In the Far East and the rest of the world, music had long been considered divine. Even plays were offered up to gods or spirits and they were said to reside within them. Those traditions had left Europe and the Middle East after the Tsirhc and Mlasi religions took over and nature worship faded away, and such things had become more about the authority of statesmen even in Asia, but…

“The Far East still sees a connection to the divine in these things.”

When holding a festival, one prayed to a god for success, and at the end one would hold a “conclusion” to let the god know it was over. Gagaku and plays were divine rituals meant to summon festival-

loving gods. When that was successful, the area's impurities would be purified and erased.

The ether tuner created a location for a god to be summoned, stabilized the god's existence, and got the tuning of the area underway. Just like a portable shrine, the device controlled the ley lines to gather the location's impurities and then had the god erase them.

It was both a pure location for summoning a god as well as a dangerous location that gathered impurities. The initial tuning work could not be done by normal students, so…

"Mito! It's stabilized! Raise the container with the ley line extraction inside!"

"Judge!"

On Asama's instructions, Mitotsudaira turned the container's handle.

This is heavy, thought the half-werewolf as she turned it. Normally, a god of war would use specialized equipment to turn it and pull up the container, so it was not meant for an individual.

…But I can do it!

It was only maybe once a month that she came across some work that required gathering all of her strength.

＜**Instructions: Spin, spin, spin～**＞

What is this? she wondered, but when she remembered it was an IZUMO product, she ignored it.

She wrapped just her right hand's fingers around the handle and turned it three times. On the final turn, she felt something like a screw coming out. At the very end, she felt something strongly fit into place.

And…

<Instructions: Push it in with a mother's gentle touch.>

Mitotsudaira thought with a smile and finally slowly pushed it in.

<Instructions: Wrong.>

"…"

She gave it some more thought. "Umm," she said while changing her previous approach and pushing it in with a stroking touch.

<Instructions: Needs more love.>

"Be more specific!!"

"Mito! Mito! If you don't hurry up, your glove will expire!!"

She glanced at the formatted meter on the back of her hand and found it was past halfway.

I need to hurry, she thought, but then she came to a stop. She tried to push it in quite gently, so she was not sure what to do now.

…Don't tell me it requires the much more forceful gentleness of my mother.

She breathed in and emulated her mother when the woman would scold her with a smile.

"…Hnn!!"

A great roar passed through to the bottom of the ship and the ground below her feet shook. Asama cried out and nearly fell, but Kimi caught her.

"W-wait, Mito! And Kimi, why are you groping me!?"

"Eh!? What are you talking about, Asama! How can I not grope you!? That's the standard form for the back-attack according to the version of Sun Tzu's The Art of War written after he levelled up to being known as Dirty Old Man Sun Tzu! It says to stick your hands through under her arms and say 'Sorry, our legs seem to have

gotten tangled up'!"

"Mito, I'm going to ignore this crazy person, so just tell me why you made a full power strike."

"Eh? But that was only about 70%?"

The third years looked shocked, but Asama and Kimi looked more understanding. That may have been a sign of what made them worthwhile friends.

At any rate, she looked back to the container's sign frame.

<**Instructions: …I'll accept that just this once.**>

The container rose. It was a metal cylinder, but the middle became a square cage with a thick bundle of charms inside.

The charms were glowing. The density of the charms showed just how much ether was gathered, but they only glowed dully since the ether was stable. Mitotsudaira needed to repeat the process in the four corners, and then…

"Kimi will dance and Tomo will play music to equally tune all of the containers."

"Yes, if the god is going to be summoned during the actual festival, we need to bring out any stagnated areas now, so be careful."

Asama was speaking not just to Mitotsudaira and Kimi but to the surrounding third years as well.

Stagnated ether in the ley lines could become mysterious phenomena. And instead of simple ones like strange noises and lights, they tended to appear as monsters.

Most of the third years started paying more attention to them and some placed charms or short swords on their waists. Mitotsudaira prepared a spell shield charm and walked over to the next container she needed to raise.

Asama looked her way and raised the reinforced biwa she used as

an instrument.

“Um, you have to play too, Mito.”

“What!? …N-no one told me that!”

“Toori-kun said you played the viola and cello at the Knight Union’s year-end festival, so I brought something like that for you. Yes.”

“Wh-why does he have to do things like that when he never does what really matters?”

“What really matters?”

The other two girls tilted their heads, but Mitotsudaira did not feel like answering.

…I’m talking about treating me like his knight.

She had made a promise with him in middle school. It had happened during a time in her life she was embarrassed to think about and it had created who she was now.

But recently…

…I wonder if he even still remembers that promise.

She also felt like she had messed up a lot herself.

Making herself his knight would be a one-sided thing if he had forgotten their promise and that made her afraid to find out if he really had forgotten, so she had been unable to ask him.

“But given the times, I get the feeling things might just continue on like this without anything changing.”

She spoke that comment below her breath and turned toward Asama and Kimi.

She thought about “what really matters” again and opened her mouth.

She shifted her thoughts from herself and to the idea in general.

“I suppose what really matters in this age is investigating the Apocalypse and finding a way to stop it.”

“Heh heh. And you’re placing that burden on my Toori’s shoulders? But he’s gotten even more lax since he started visiting our mom’s café again.”

“It’s probably going to be a while before we can get bread for breakfast at the Main Blue Thunder again.”

Mitotsudaira looked at the torii-shaped handle for the container that opened the tuner’s four corners. She then looked to the biwa viola case Asama was holding up.

“Anyway, let’s do what we can in preparation to summon a god. Then we can get some tea as a treat while we look at Aki.”

“Can you hear that noise? Hm?”

Someone spoke in the center of Rome, the city at the center of Aki. The stone steps in front of the academy/cathedral gave a nice view of the sky and someone sat on those steps with an elderly demon standing behind him.

“Galileo, what does it sound like to you?”

“Innocentius, you really are the kind of boy – no, former boy – who likes to ask things you already know the answer to.”

“I try not to trust myself too much. I did that in the past and it did not end well…for K.P.A. Italia.”

“So you have plenty of confidence and you’re simply getting further confirmation from others, former boy?”

Galileo crossed his arms as he continued.

“The Far East’s Gagaku reminds me of the Music of the Spheres. It lacks a few of the sounds, but the gentle cycle and few changes are quite similar.”

“Galileo, you really are the kind of teacher – no, former teacher – who likes to make things more complicated than they need to be. How about you find a simpler way of saying that? Hm?”

“I’m pretty sure you understood well enough. The Music of the Spheres was sought in the Greek era and is still brought up by some odd people today, but the Far East has already grasped it in a more primitive way.”

“You mean how they tune the ley lines with music and sometimes even summon gods? Hm?”

“Testament.”

Innocentius looked away from Galileo.

“That’s the problem with heathens. They get close to heaven, but they try to use it as something functional.”

“Testament,” said Galileo again before forming long breaths of laughter. “The religions of uncivilized peoples often contain the divine in their music, dance, and plays. You find it in the Dark Continent and New World as well. …In other words, the less cultural exchange they have and the less developed they are, the more naturally people grow close to gods and spirits. And their music, dance, and plays end up taking on that theme.”

“Not everyone has the ‘abnormal’ ability to create music, dance, and plays, so they view it as a gift from heaven. And so they continue creating gods and spirits with their own power. But…”

Innocentius looked up into the sky.

He listened to the sound coming from the two theatre ships in the eastern sky.

“That’s incompatible with us, isn’t it? Hm?”

“Testament. The Tsirhc religion stopped worshiping gods of nature or worshipping powerful people as gods. Instead, we came to believe in the god that resides in each and every one of us. In that way we are a religion of ‘people’. With our god and our hymns, we

follow our commandments, believe those commandments are holy, and thus make ourselves holy as ‘people’. That is incompatible with the Far East’s festivals that summon a god to purify their impurities like some kind of indulgence for their sins.”

“They worship different gods. That is why they are heathens. And that is fine for them.”

“You accept it?”

“I will not accept heretics, but I will accept heathens.”

“Then what are you saying is so incompatible, former boy?”

“Testament,” replied Innocentius. “Do our strong points fit together with theirs?”

He crossed his legs, pulled a water bottle from inside his summer cape, uncorked it, and poured some water in the corner of his mouth.

“We are those who became ‘people’ by abandoning our worship of the ancient gods. By believing that god is within us, we can say that god is always watching over us, so we can go anywhere and we can be alone. We are those who hold god inside. Our commandments and hymns are meant to correct ourselves so that we can remain with god. Isn’t that right? Hm?”

He then added a “but”.

“They say their gods reside in all parts of the environment and they have no real commandments, so they cannot change themselves. They simply curry their gods’ favor with song and dance in order to give themselves more peace. They never became ‘people’. They remain uncivilized. But…”

“But?”

“Did you know this? Under the Tsirhc religion, it took over a thousand years to reach the Renaissance that allowed us to regain the ‘self’ inside us that goes beyond being mere servants of god.”

“Then,” said Galileo. “Have the Far East’s people retained their ‘self’ for a thousand years longer than us?”

“After going through the Renaissance, we are ‘people’ and we also have our ‘self’. That puts us above them.”

“Former boy, I’m having trouble telling which side you’re supporting here.”

“Catholicism is equal to all, Galileo. But only when under Catholicism’s protection. If those uncivilized heathens wish to hold a festival, they are free to do so once they have our permission. Isn’t that right? Hm?”

Innocentius continued from there.

“Honestly, I doubt those uncivilized heathens have thought about or worried about any of this. To be ‘people’ is to be adults. Don’t you think? Hm?”

“Far Eastern students have to retire after age eighteen, so I am not sure that is entirely their fault, former boy.”

“Then in name and in fact, we are the adults lending our sky to the children.”

Innocentius spat a breath toward the ground without forming a smile.

“The Far East has their childish ‘self’ and has spent over a thousand years without becoming ‘people’. But I will admit that their music for tuning ley lines and their techniques for summoning gods are valuable cultural assets.”

“Why not just be honest and say you like the sound of their music?”

“Hey, hey. I didn’t say that.”

“Then what is it?” asked Galileo.

The pope formed a bitter smile.

“Surely a demon like you can see the movement in the surrounding ether. What do you have to say about the stagnation approaching the theatre ships? Hm?”

Galileo looked up to the sky.

The music had stopped and all hint of motion had vanished from the theatre ships.

“Testament. …Former boy, should we send out help?”

“Didn’t I tell you? Catholicism is equal to all and we will allow heathen festivals. Far Eastern festivals are apparently meant to purify their impurities by summoning a god, but that means their festival will gather impurities. Thus, this is the Far East’s responsibility. Helping them would create an inequality, so we cannot do that. If what happens now remains a part of their festival, then everything will remain equal.”

Innocentius took a sip of water.

“Tell the PR committee to ignore any requests for help from the Far East or Aki until such time as we will be damaged. It will be here in less than three minutes.”

“What do you think it will be?”

“Testament. A type of Apocalyptic mysterious phenomenon. When ether impurities are purified, stagnation will be sucked in to take its place. And often in a bestial form.”

Now, then.

“Here it comes. Aki is made up of noncombatants to prevent a rebellion, so what will Musashi do?”

Asama stood in the center of the tuner with Kimi and Mitotsudaira.

An ether stagnation gathered in the ship and the surrounding air. It formed in front of her eyes. She and Mitotsudaira used their music to tune that ether and remove the stagnation while Kimi's dance gathered and solidified it.

The third years watched warily on in the distance, but Asama did not turn toward them. Neither did Kimi and Mitotsudaira or even Hanami and Uzy who floated above their heads.

They were focused on the stagnation that had appeared at their feet.

"What is this?"

It was a wolf, but it was only about fifteen centimeters tall. It had nearly super-deformed proportions and it was looking up at them in curiosity while wagging its tail. It almost looked like a stuffed animal at that size, but it was definitely a monster.

"It has three heads. What do you call that? There's that three-headed wolf in Greek mythology called…oh, right! I know! Youkai Dreimara!!"

"Stop mixing Far Eastern, M.H.R.R., and Indian terms, Kimi. And if it was Mara-sama, it wouldn't be heads. It would have been pe-…"

After reaching that point in her explanation, Asama realized what she was saying.

"No, wait! Never mind! And that's Buddhism, isn't it!?"

"…"

…Ahh, this silence is painful!!

Mitotsudaira was the first to recover. She brought a hand to her mouth and cleared her throat.

"Is it because we passed through Kojima, which corresponds to Greece? This is clearly the Cerberus from Greek mythology, isn't it?"

“Wait, Mito! If you call its name-…”

Before Asama could finish, the Cerberus approached Mitotsudaira and began rubbing its heads against her leg. All three heads tried to do it at once, so it fell over.

“Mitotsudaira’s in charge of it!!” exclaimed Kimi. “It’s yours now!!”

“Wh-why are you moving away from me!? You too, Tomo!?”

“Well, not even a shrine maiden wants to kill something that cute just because it’s a stagnation.”

“I don’t want to either! What am I supposed to do!?”

They needed to purify it here, but…

“There must not have been much of a stagnation around here and the ether in and around the ship must have been doing well. From an ether standpoint, the low-power stagnation couldn’t take form of its own, so it used a ‘mold’ from the surrounding environment and also used the purified ether to manifest here. According to Hanami’s readings, the amount of tuned ether dropped when it appeared.”

“You mean our ceremony was so powerful that a stagnation too weak to make an appearance worked up the willpower to gather the clean ether and make its appearance?”

“It would seem that way. In terms of ghosts, this isn’t one bound to a location by a grudge. It’s more like a weak wandering ghost or poltergeist borrowing the spiritual power of the land to appear as a servant of the local god. But it is still a stagnation, so it is a target for purification. It will eventually lose its physical form, but that will return the stagnation to the ship and surrounding space.”

“When will it lose its physical form?”

Mitotsudaira must have been worried about her footing because she kept glancing down. Asama knew a lie would not help, so she told the truth.

“A bit after this ship or the Musashi leaves this airspace. It will be

unable to maintain that form when we leave the divine protections and culture that gave it the Cerberus form. And even if we stay, the Gagaku Festival is being held on the evening of the full moon. Once the moonlight sends its ether reaction to the peak, it should naturally return to being ether."

"Eh?"

Asama smiled bitterly at the look on Mitotsudaira's face.

"The Musashi can't move until the Gagaku Festival ends a week from now. The Asama Shrine will purify it then, so don't worry."

"That's right, Mitotsudaira. They'll use a Shinto grater to slice that adorable little thing to pieces and offer it up to their god, butt-first! Then they'll throw it in a blender to truly puree-fy it!"

"W-wait! Don't do that to it!"

Mitotsudaira picked up the Cerberus and took a step back.

…*Yes.*

Asama exchanged a glance with Kimi and spoke to Mitotsudaira.

"Mito, you're in charge of it, okay?"

Kimi heard Mitotsudaira shout "Ehhh!?" while not letting go of the Cerberus.

…Getting too attached to it would be dangerous in its own way.

But, thought Kimi. *Telling her not to get at all attached wouldn't stop her.*

So…

"If it was me, I would adore it as much as possible to give it some nice memories."

"B-but it's a stagnation, right!? Is that really okay?"

“Um, then Mito? Why aren’t you letting go of it?”

“W-well…”

As Mitotsudaira’s gaze wandered, Kimi put on a fake pale face and pointed a trembling hand toward the three-headed creature.

“Don’t tell me…you see it as meat…”

The Cerberus looked up at the silver wolf who gasped.

“N-no! I would never do that!”

She shook her head.

“Honestly, I am only holding on to it because I can handle anything that might happen!”

“Heh heh. Then it sounds like you really are perfect for the job.”

Mitotsudaira groaned and leaned back, but it seemed she could not avoid being its foster parent.

Asama took a step forward and crouched down to the Cerberus’s eye level as Mitotsudaira held it.

“Then please look after it, Mito. It is definitely a stagnation, but it’s also a Greek spirit partially made out of the tuned ether from this ship and its surroundings. As I said before, it has a lot of the traits of a local god. Carelessly purifying it could slaughter a bunch of another nation’s spirits, so I think it would be best to use the natural destruction of the full moon to remove the stagnation and offer it up to its god.”

“Remove the stagnation? Offer it up to its god? …What do you mean?”

“Only its stagnation will be removed and the ether will be returned, so only the Cerberus spirit portion will remain. Then we can take it to its god.”

Of course, thought Kimi. *If that happens, it will lose the ether it needs*

to maintain its body.

But…

“It will travel to the ‘realm’ of its god as a Cerberus spirit. Instead of being killed or destroyed, it will become a resident of the spiritual realm, so there is nothing to worry about.”

“Really?”

“Heh heh. So what will you do?” asked Kimi while observing Mitotsudaira’s reaction. “Are you going to abandon it because you know you have to say goodbye? Adele has some guts, so she would probably take it in if we explained the situation. As would my Toori.”

“N-no, I will take care of it. This is part of my job here helping the Asama Shrine.”

“Will you? …Then please do, Mito. Ether stagnations don’t grow stagnated because they want to. Just remember that the stagnation and their personality are two different things. And the more love you show it, the higher its rank when it’s purified and sent to the divine realm.”

Mitotsudaira nodded and lowered the Cerberus to the floor.

“Heh heh.” Kimi narrowed her eyes and placed a hand on Mitotsudaira’s head. “So now the pet has a pet of her own. …Stay, stay.”

“I-I am not a dog.”

Mitotsudaira brushed the girl’s hand away and Kimi realized Asama had naturally started smiling at this usual series of events.

…She really has trouble saying it out loud.

At the same time, the surrounding third years let down their guard. They all exchanged a glance and looked to the Cerberus at Mitotsudaira’s feet.

“Does this mean the stagnation inside us all was this adorable?”

“Wait, it became a Cerberus because we passed through Greece. So if we’d passed through India, would it be Mara-sama?”

“Three heads in that sense? That’s certainly a new kind of creature! That would’ve been awful!!”

If Naruze heard that, she’d have an illustration ready in a flash, thought Kimi.

But…

…*What is it?*

Hanami and Uzy were facing west, as was the Cerberus at Mitotsudaira’s feet.

“…!”

All three let out quiet cries at once.

Something was there in the west.

Asama, Kimi, and Mitotsudaira followed their Mice’s attention.

They looked west.

“Heh heh heh. There’s something like a god of war on top of the Noh Stage.”

“No! That’s a stagnation!”

Asama shouted back on reflex and the wind began to move.

“…!”

A gust of wind swirled around the Noh Stage that had approached from Aki. That wind seemed to surround something that had appeared on the Noh Stage. It looked like an armored warrior made of ether with a heated coloration.

Asama knew what it was. In Shinto, it was a mid-class existence among ether stagnations.

“It’s the remains of a god that never achieved its physical form in a land that combines the molds of several gods! Based on its weaponry form, this would be a Class 2 Non-God Sword!”

“ ‘Musashi’-san, it looks like trouble has shown up again.”

A voice described the situation inside a vast, white, cocoon-like space.

A giant city ship made up of two central ships and three port and starboard ships was contained in that stealth space. Pipe smoke gently rose from the front end as an alarm blared.

The front central ship bore the overall ship name “Musashi” and the individual ship name “Musashino”. A man past middle age stood on the deck at the bow with his elbows resting on the railing.

He lazily wore his short-sleeved summer clothing and he held up a metal kiseru that could be broken down into parts for storage.

“Sakai-sama, this may be occurring outside the Musashi and it may be Aki’s problem, but shouldn’t you sound at least a little bit nervous? Over.”

“Well, you see,” said Sakai as he turned toward the voice behind him.

A maid automaton stood there. He took a teacup from the tray she held and then he frowned.

“Oh, this is hot, ‘Musashi’-san. You seem to like hot things lately.”

“I cannot serve only cold things to an adult who never goes outside and stays in the cooled areas even though it is July. Over.”

“Thanks for the concern, but to answer your question…do I really not look nervous?”

“I am suggesting you make an appearance outside. I do not know why, but every year when we arrive at Aki, you always avoid areas that let you be seen from outside. Over.”

“Well, I just have so many great memories of Aki…”

“I cannot easily search my memories before the great remodeling as they are not set to my standard memory region, so I will simply ask: Is it about a woman? Or money? Over.”

“ ‘Musashi’-san, do you promise not to get mad if I tell the truth?”

“I am an automaton and thus cannot get mad. Now, answer me. Over.”

“The thing is, you sound really mad right now. …Well, whatever.”

Sakai frowned with the kiseru in his left hand and the teacup in his right hand.

“A long time ago, I had a bit of a fight with an idiot in Aki.”

“Hearing any more would likely involve me in some kind of political trouble, so I will ask again when I deem it necessary. But…”

“What?”

“Did you win or lose? Over.”

“I won.”

“Is that so? I will ask for details at some point. Over.”

“Musashi” bowed and Sakai took a sip from the teacup.

“Oh? I thought this would be ginger flavor, but it’s caramel. It’s pretty sweet.”

“Statistically, I have determined it is popular with the girls. Now, about the current situation which is far from sweet…”

“Judge,” Sakai nodded and held the teacup out toward “Musashi”.

Suddenly, the kiseru in his left hand came apart. An invisible hand grabbed it, gathered the three parts, and even compressed the ashes.

“ ‘Musashi’-san, I only just started smoking those leaves.”

He put the kiseru away in the case hanging from his neck and “Musashi” bowed.

“Smoking is forbidden on the decks while in the stealth space. Please visit the ship’s smoking purification shrine. Over.”

“You sure are strict. …Okay, I’ll tell you what you wanted to know.”

He opened a few sign frames.

“Aki is Far Eastern territory, but it is also a reservation under K.P.A. Italia’s provisional rule. So any trouble in Aki is generally under K.P.A. Italia’s control.”

“You make it sound like a ‘but’ is coming. Over.”

“Judge. There are times when those laws are too strict to work well.”

“Judge.” “Musashi” nodded. “When the ruling nation is transporting warriors or equipment for the history recreation, they might not be able to arrive very quickly when the reservation is in danger. There are also cases when the ruling nation has insufficient strength. At those times, any force able to arrive immediately is permitted to intervene as long as their only goal and only result is the resolution of the incident and as long as they leave behind no records of their presence. Over.”

“Judge. The state of the Testament and the process for the history recreation were determined during the Age of Dawn, well before the Harmonic Unification War. This right to emergency intervention was spelled out in the Anti-Decline Pro-Tuning agreement. That specific clause is often referenced in the stores of the Testament Cross-Borders Unit which some doubt even exists.”

“And thanks to that, many black disks telling such stories have piled up in your closet. …But are you saying K.P.A. Italia is not going to act here? Over.”

“Oh, I’m sure they will, but it won’t be pretty when they do.”

“? Over.”

As “Musashi” tilted her head, Sakai took a sip from the teacup.

“I won’t say what caused it, but despite K.P.A. Italia’s temporary prosperity, they have been tossed about by the economic currents ever since the Reformation and the Age of Exploration. …They have Testamenta Arma and a Logismoi Óplo, but their economic foundation has grown relatively weak and the neighboring M.H.R.R. Catholics allying with P.A. Oda has to be an absolute nightmare for them. …Do you know what they’re going to do now?”

“Musashi” narrowed her eyes. After a while, she looked to the sky beyond Sakai. Her gaze turned towards the Tanigawa Castle and Noh Stage that had to exist beyond the stealth barrier.

“If they intervene and determine they cannot settle the problem, will they destroy everything? Will they use the Far East as an example to show the other nations how powerful they are? Over.”

“Judge. If the Far East can settle the problem on its own, K.P.A. Italia can show that they did not consider this to be a problem worth acting on. And if the Far East fails, they can make a greater intervention than necessary to demonstrate their strength to the other nations. …It gives them an excuse for their show of force, so it would be politically safer. And it costs much less than an actual war. K.P.A. Italia would be willing to make a decision like that.”

“You seem to trust them quite a bit. Over.”

“I suppose I do.” He did not deny it, but he did look to one of his sign frames. “Our Student Council and Chancellor’s Officers got moving pretty quick. They’re drawing out the territorial lines with K.P.A. Italia and Aki. I just have to give them my approval as

Principal…and done.”

“But Sakai-sama, what about the theatre ships themselves? Surely we cannot leave them undefended until the Student Council and Chancellor’s Officers arrive.”

“Normal citizens and students are allowed to act in self-defense or to save someone. They don’t have to wait until someone’s hurt either. The only question is whether anyone capable of that is there.”

“Judge,” said “Musashi” with a nod.

She opened a sign frame and displayed a list of those who had left aboard the Tanigawa Castle.

“A few students from Oriotorai-sama’s Class 2-Plum are there. Over.”

“What do you think about Makiko-kun’s training scenes?”

“Judge. If I had to express it somehow, I would say they still lack the proper ‘excitement’. I have determined they lack the proper level of physical destruction and the normal citizens’ annoyance level and spectator level are only average. Over.”

“Do you think they’ll be able to compare to the current Student Council and Chancellor’s Officers?”

“Well…”

“Musashi” briefly closed her eyes to perform the high-speed thought of an automaton.

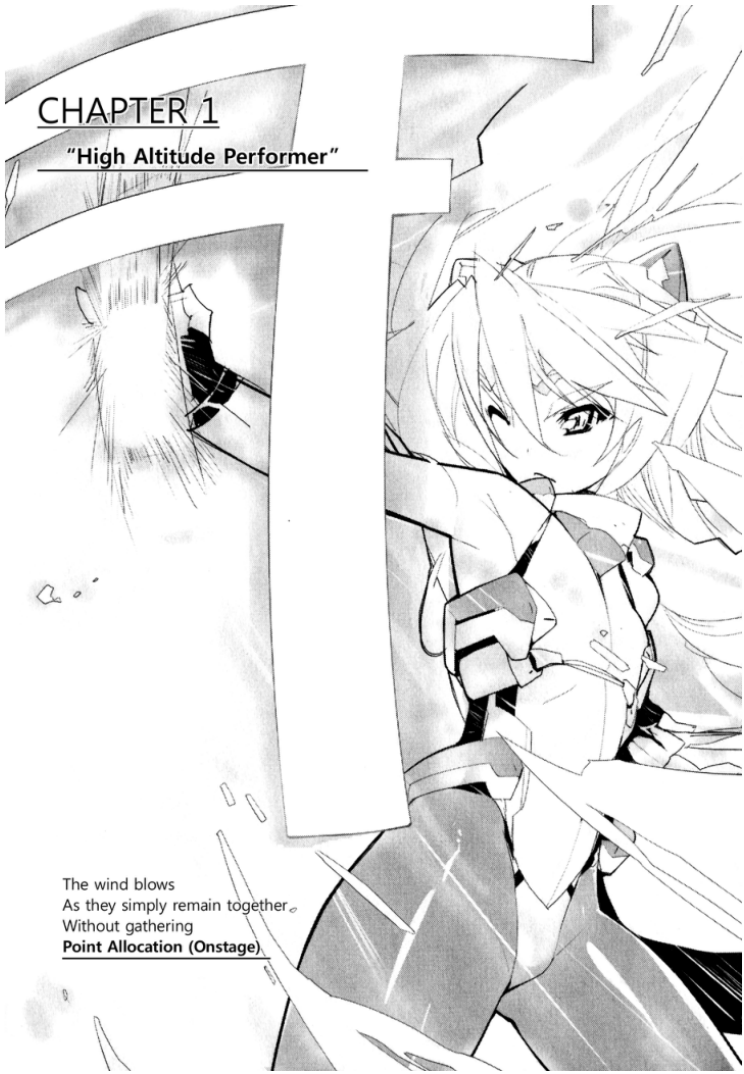
“Mankind can grow and evolve. If they make use of those abilities, they can. Over.”

“Judge. Then I hope they have plenty of reasons to do so. Socializing, as well as unexpected meetings, partings, and confrontations, can all lead to growth. So…”

Now, then.

“What will these children do? These children from the generation that will face the Apocalypse.”

Chapter 1: High Altitude Performer



The wind blows

As they simply remain together

Without gathering

Point Allocation (Onstage)

The color white began spiraling through the sky.

The wide arc of that wind turned the chilly air's moisture into mist and ice which surrounded the theatre ship floating in the sky.

It swept away the chill and the diamond dust wind raced across the Noh Stage's deck like a blade.

With a scraping sound, a long groove twenty centimeters wide and five centimeters deep was carved into the wooden deck.

The small pieces of ice had transformed the wind into a saw.

There was more than one gust of wind. It was mostly spiraling around, but several lightning-like gusts formed and shot back and forth as if playing. More and more slicing sounds rang out and a new line was carelessly drawn across the deck each time.

Most of the people on the deck preparing for the Gagaku Festival fled inside the ship using the various hatches.

Then they saw a giant form stand up from the ether tuner on the Noh Stage's main stage.

It was ether. Ether would normally glow blue, but it had grown disturbed and instead glowed a dim yellow. And that nearly dull golden light formed an almost humanoid form.

It was about eight meters tall and had no arms or face. It simply had a torso, legs seemingly made of blades, and armor also seemingly made of blades.

"A Non-God Sword!?"

The Non-God Sword moved as if in response. It had only been rising from the ether tuner to establish its form, but now it raised its

faceless upper body.

“…!!”

Its chest armor tightened inward. The action was similar to a human swinging their arms forward.

One of the students, a third year with a defense spell activated by a charm, stood up from a hatch and gave a shout.

“Fall back! A Non-God Sword is a type of summoned god, but its confused thoughts make it attack indiscriminately!”

A moment later, the wind gained a will of its own. Before, the blade-like gusts that had been racing back and forth as if for fun, but now two of them raced straight forward from the left and right of the Non-God Sword.

Their target was some Aki students who had failed to escape in time.

There were three of them.

One was a second year girl and the other two were first year girls. One of the first years had apparently sprained her ankle after tripping over one of the grooves carved into the deck.

The crazed god rejected everything not from its holy ground.

That rejection took the form of twin attacks that tore through the deck in their race for the three stopped girls.

The three had no way to dodge it and that fact became clear to everyone there.

“Willpower!!”

At that moment, two third year boys raced aft, one from the front port hatch and one from the front starboard hatch. Each boy removed his summer uniform shirt to reveal an undershirt that said, “Aki Academy Track Team”. They were regulars with official numbers.

They were on the way to rescue the girls.

The two boys raced full speed toward the three unmoving girls at the stern of the deck.

The boy on the port side was barefoot and the one on the starboard side wore spikes.

They almost seemed to be following the two gusts of wind up ahead, but all they did was place the back end of those gusts in their field of vision.

“…!!”

They lowered their stance for a full-power dash and used their pumping arms to activate acceleration spell charms.

The barefoot one to port used one that purified the burden on and weariness in his body.

The spike one to starboard used one that applied acceleration primarily to his knees.

They activated them at the same time.

“_____!”

And they accelerated all at once. The acceleration did not grow with time. With each step they took, they pushed their bodies forward along the deck, as if running up a wall.

“Hey!”

The barefoot one to port shouted to the other one approximately thirty meters to his starboard.

“Let’s settle this once and for all!!’”

“Right!!”

The spike one responded with his breaths appearing white in the

air.

“I’m definitely cooler than you!!”

“Saying that about yourself is proof that you aren’t!”

“Then,” shouted the spike one. “Let’s prove right here which one of us is cooler, you barefoot bastard!”

“What!? What kind of team captain is stupid enough to damage the deck for a little extra speed!?”

But the two of them faced forward, looked to the wind strikes up ahead, and shouted in unison.

“We can’t have a proper competition with those in the way!”

They passed by the wind in a mere three steps.

They broke through the air and scattered the ether light of acceleration spells as they raced onward.

Up ahead, they could see the three girls who had failed to escape.

“Jump, cuties!!” shouted the barefoot one.

The girls exchanged a glance.

“_____”

They shook their head and the spike one shouted to the barefoot one.

“Don’t make this harder on them than it already is! …Just jump!!”

The two first year girls jumped. Even the one with a sprained ankle jumped with her good leg.

“Okay!”

The track team members each snatched a first year with one arm and reached their other arm toward the remaining second year girl.

“This way!!”

Having them both say it at once may have been a mistake.

“Eh!?”

The second year girl in the center was unsure which way to go and ended up not moving at all. The track team members both missed her and passed her by. They exchanged a glance, approached, and used their empty hands to point at each other.

“This is your fault!!”

But they could not head back now and the barefoot one looked back.

“Dammit! And she has a huge rack too! I wanted to ‘accidentally’ cop a feel when I grabbed her!!”

“You idiot! She avoided you because of that obvious ulterior motive!”

The spike one laughed and held out his hand.

“Ha ha. Of course, I had similar plans.”

They shook hands, but the twin wind attacks were still on their way to the second year girl behind them.

The barefoot one ended the handshake and tossed his first year girl to the spike one.

“I might not make it in time, but I’m going in for that grope!!”

“Get one in for me too!!”

“Sure thing!”

The barefoot one forced his body into a midair spin, landed, and felt the soles of his feet burning from the friction.

“Make it!!”

He ran.

"Ohhh!"

The barefoot boy pushed his body forward with all his strength.

I'll definitely make it in time, he thought. After all…

"That was a great decision, captain!!"

Light was flying around him. The team captain had scattered his acceleration spell through the air.

This gave the barefoot one his own and the other boy's spell. The charm had been set to grant its power to others, but adjustments would normally be needed to combine it with another spell. However…

"We were using acceleration spells that didn't overlap in the slightest!"

They knew each other well, so they had worked to gain each other's strong points and make up for their weak points.

"Show them your Aki spirit!"

He kicked himself forward with double the acceleration and he forcibly tore through the air on his way forward.

It would take him only five steps to get there.

But…

"…!?"

The wind blew in from the right and this new strike was timed with the moment of greatest speed.

The Non-God Sword had targeted him to interfere.

…Dammit!

If he dodged this, he could not get his grope, but if he kept going, he would be hit. Which meant…

“Full power!”

He leaned forward to forcibly eliminate a tiny bit more air resistance.

The result was miniscule, but it did raise his speed.

In that instant, the wind from the right accelerated.

…What!?

He knew why. The wind he had seen before corresponded to someone raising a sword, so this was the speed of swinging the sword down. In that case, it was not directed at him at all.

“That huge rack!”

The twin attacks targeting that girl also picked up speed.

He realized he was not going to make it in time, but…

“…!!”

He accelerated. He knew he had to do something, so he sped up. He knew he had to do something and find something to do, but…

“A finalist can’t rely on anything but his speed!!”

He charged forward.

The wind was coming.

It was going to hit.

At that moment, something fell from the sky between him and the approaching wind on the right. It was…

…A person!?

It was a girl, but…

“Owwwwwww!!!!”

With a great sound of destruction, the wind approaching the barefoot finalist vanished.

But that was not all.

The two winds attacking the girl he was trying to save also vanished.

What just happened? he wondered.

But his body continued moving before he could think.

He grabbed the second year girl.

His right hand “slipped”.

The “slip” of his left hand was for the team captain.

Yes, this is for the captain. And since it’s for him, one more wouldn’t hurt. Yes, I need to make sure I keep possession of this! For the captain! Oh, but this one can be for me, I guess.

“It can, can’t it!? Can’t it!?”

He accidentally spoke out loud and got slapped.

It was an excellent slap, so he decided to recommend her to the sumo team later.

But as he ran toward the hatch that his fellow students were gesturing him toward, he checked behind him.

Why were they unhurt?

“Is that…?”

They were Musashi students and there were three in all.

One was near where the wind heading toward him had vanished. A

blonde girl in glasses and a track suit was collapsed on the deck with her eyes spinning.

One was near the collapsed glasses girl. She had giant breasts and wore a black shrine maiden outfit.

The last was near where the winds heading toward the second year girl had vanished.

She was…

“Second in line to ruling the Far East, Nate Mitotsudaira!?”

Mitotsudaira stuck a charm comb in her hair to stop it from dancing in the wind.

She then pulled an armband from the wicker basket attached to her waist hard point.

Her shrine maiden outfit had no sleeves and thus no place to attach an armband, so she simply held up the armband and spoke in a carrying voice.

“I am Nate Mitotsudaira, Musashi Knight League Rank 1 and Extra Special Duty Officer of Musashi’s Chancellor’s Officers. …I will take charge of this scene.”

She faced forward and attached the armband to her waist hard point.

She then pulled a charm stocker from the wicker basket and attached to her wrist. The stocker showed signs of a few charms having already been pulled out, and it was stocked with…

“Shinto spell shields.”

Up ahead, the Non-God Sword was facing her. It had already raised its arms, so…

“…!”

The wind blew in. This time, it was six gusts at once.

She raised her eyebrows as the blades of icy wind rushed in from six directions simultaneously.

“I will push back!”

She opened a spell shield in both hands, thrust it forward, and started to run.

Kimi watched Mitotsudaira’s back as she ran forward.

…*Will she be okay?*

Not even two seconds later, sounds of destruction exploded from Mitotsudaira and white ice rose like smoke. Five or six trails of ice rose all at once.

The Shinto spell shield Mitotsudaira was using defended by reducing the enemy’s force and speed. It was the standard type for the Far East.

Unlike the Catholic and Protestant reflection types, whatever hit it would lose its power and either vanish or fall straight down. This had looked more like an explosion because the wind blades were quite large vertically, so when the bottom was reduced, the top could not keep up and it collapsed in on itself.

But…

“Taking that much force at once will wear down the charm like crazy. …Mitotsudaira, can’t you run any faster? That looks more like 70% right now.”

Even if Mitotsudaira had not been defending against the wind, Kimi had a feeling she could run and catch up to the girl, but…

“I-I’m running as fast as I can!”

Kimi had always thought Mitotsudaira was the heavy tank type, but

not this much.

…Not only is she running on her heels, but she's using her strength all wrong.

Kimi could not give the girl any advice because she was bad with descriptions, but she could tell Mitotsudaira's stance was focusing more on strength than speed. While that could be a problem in some situations, not being blown away meant a lot against an opponent with such great power.

Then I guess it's fine for now, concluded Kimi.

"Ahh…"

Adele unsteadily lifted her head from the deck at Kimi's feet.

"Oh, you can move, Adele? Are you okay? If you think you've been knocked senseless, I could grope you. How about it?"

"And how would that help me!? How!? …Sorry, I shouldn't have dignified that with a response. Um, where's the Extra Special Duty Officer?"

Three explosions of wind sounded out at almost the same time.

They looked back to see Mitotsudaira continuing forward. However, her pace was falling. She was within fifty meters of the Non-God Sword, but the number of wind swords was growing.

The Non-God Sword was likely only now really beginning to use its power.

"Here it comes."

Kimi listened to the wind. Even that raging whirlwind had a melody to it.

Adele got up, took a crouching stance, and nodded.

"Non-Gods like a Non-God Sword are created from a ley line disturbance that causes the spiritual molds of the land and

surrounding lands to overlap. This one is probably a fusion of the European coast's legendary giants and gods as well as the Far East's Genpei war and the ironworking culture of the Bizen area."

"Is that secondhand information? From who? Four eyes?"

"Judge. Neshinbara-san seemed really happy as he talked about it over the divine network."

"There are these rare times when he has some useful information. If only he wasn't always talking about superpowers and other nonsense from anime and novels. Well, fine."

Kimi listened to the noise.

"Heh heh. I don't know much about Non-God Swords or whatever, but if you're going to use swords, you need to use a sexier design. If all we're up against is brute strength, then leave it to me, Gracias Aoi, to pave the way forward. That will clear the way to the ending, so you will be beaten to a pulp in no time."

"Eh? Y-you can do that?"

"Oh? Adele, have I ever said I could do something that I couldn't? You also won't hear me say I will become the world's best woman, hold the world in the palm of my hand, or become the very definition of beauty, but why would I bother saying anything I could do so easily? The things that I truly don't know if I can do or not are much closer to home. Heh heh. And compared to those things…"

A small smile appeared on the corner of her mouth.

"I can easily make this Non-God or whatever look up to me."

Mitotsudaira moved forward.

The wind continued to collide with her and her spell shields kept breaking, but…

…I cannot fall back!

Monsters created by an ether distortion were usually bound to a location and this Non-God Sword was no exception. Just as spirits preferred the environment suited to them and gods preferred holy grounds, this Non-God attempted to secure and protect the location it had appeared in.

But as a being born of an ether distortion and stagnation, its optimal location did not exist in this world. After all, this world was generally well-ordered.

So it bound itself to its current location and dyed the surrounding space in its own colors. If the world was unsuited toward it, it would remake that world.

Small monsters would be worn down by the process of spreading its domain and would disappear.

That was the normal outcome.

But that would not happen when one had extracted enough ether to support itself even as it stagnated the surrounding space.

That was the case here.

If left alone, its domain would spread to a portion of the deck and the surrounding space, so Mitotsudaira had a single goal.

“Keep the Non-God Sword focused on itself rather than its surroundings!”

She kept her stance low and opened her shield so it would not leave her body. Like that, she collided with the charging wind, received it, and swept it aside. Whenever her shield shattered…

…I open a new one!

She had plenty of charms. She had often played the role of defender in training and mock battles. To prepare her for conflicts with other nations, she had used a shield against a god of war or ship’s cannon on several occasions. Running out of charms and being unable to

defend was a common mistake, but she had grown out of doing that halfway through the previous year.

She had strength but no speed, so her role was defense.

The Testament Union had appointed her to the temporary position of Extra Special Duty Officer with the Chancellor's Officers, but that was only because they wanted some influence over her as second in line to ruling the Far East.

She had already reached Rank 1 in the Knight League and she had performed official duties since halfway through middle school, so this was nothing new for her.

At first, everyone had apparently considered putting her in the rear guard, but…

"The Far East doesn't have many defenders."

The Far East's primary weapons were the sword, spear, and rifle, so they had little concept of shields. Their reduction shields were tricky to use until one got the hang of the system and they mostly required staying in one spot.

The Far East needed a barrier to apply pressure to the enemy while actively moving forward.

That meant acting as bait to draw the enemy's attacks, so Mitotsudaira would always move forward, yet…

…An attacker always moves past me and takes all the glory for themselves.

Hers was a thankless role.

But, she thought.

…Everyone expected me to be a delinquent.

Before gaining official duties as a knight, she had been violent, damaged many people and things, and even harmed herself.

Making up for it with this defense role was only her personal view of the situation, but she was fine with that. And…

"…!"

She heard a small cry from down at her feet.

She recognized the sudden, quiet roar.

"Eh?"

It was the Cerberus.

Mitotsudaira looked down at her newborn follower.

To her, it seemed to have followed her without being asked, but it may have thought it was leading her and threatening the enemy.

It could always flee and it seemed somewhat afraid, but the three-headed wolf still roared at the Non-God Sword. She placed it in the corner of her vision, and…

…*Honestly*.

"I need to do this right!"

She moved forward and broke through the wind.

She heard the voices of the Aki students who had evacuated into the hatches.

Strength filled those voices, yet just a few years before, she would have only heard fearful and cautious voices.

"Honestly," she said aloud this time.

She raised her eyebrows, moved forward, and spoke to herself in the wind.

"He was the one dragged me into all this and now he's practically ignoring me? What is my king thinking?"

The wind struck her, but she rotated the shield in her hand to deflect, break, and surpass that power.

She moved forward and she could sense herself drawing in the enemy, but she could also sense her own lack of power.

She could protect the area around her. Even as a Non-God Sword, its physical attacks were not much different from a god of war or ship's cannon. She only had to accurately block them. But…

"There's so many!"

The amount of wind continued to grow. The Non-God Sword was doing more than attacking her in rapid succession.

"_____"

It also began walking toward her.

By filling the gap between them, it could increase its speed of attack. And…

"It's gathering the surrounding clouds, isn't it!?"

The chilly clouds surrounding the Noh Stage shrank as if being squeezed in tight. The greater density darkened the clouds and the wind was also released from the clouds instead of just the area around the Non-God Sword itself.

And then…

"Everyone, don't bother providing backup or tuning! Shut the hatches and evacuate!"

After all…

"The Non-God Sword is targeting you!!"

The Aki students were tuning the surrounding ley lines inside the large open hatches. That allowed them to restrain the expanding

stagnation and hold back the Non-God Sword's power.

In addition to spells, that required a calm heart. Those Aki students had undergone purification drills at Itsukushima Shrine, so…

"C-c-c-c-cal-cal-cal-calm d-d-d-d-dow-dow-dow-down!"

"I don't think I've ever heard someone so flustered! …Oh, no! I tore my tights! Look!"

"Are you *trying* to fill us with impure thoughts!?"

Even as they argued, they activated their spells and tuned the space around the hatches.

The wind around the hatches calmed and the clouds directly overhead cleared, allowing gentle sunlight in.

But for defense purposes, aerial ship hatches would deflect ether interference when closed, so the hatches had to be open to provide tuning. But…

"Here it comes!"

The Non-God Sword's wind was fired directly toward the hatches.

It was trying to crush the extra help so it could focus on Musashi's Extra Special Duty Officer.

There were eight wind swords. The Non-God Sword's nonexistent arms were wielding their full power as it moved forward.

Each gust of wind blew in a straight line to tear into them.

They could not close the hatches in time, so the wind struck.

Eight winds collided with those manned locations and eight sounds rang through the sky.

They were sounds of spraying destruction.

However, it did not come from the destruction of the ship and there were no screams.

The wind itself was suddenly destroyed.

“Eh?”

Even those in the hatches were confused. The wind had scattered like spray just as it was going to hit them.

They all looked up on the deck to see what had happened and they saw a light there.

It came from the center of the deck where the black shrine maiden and glasses girl had moved in to defend. The black shrine maiden was standing there and the glasses girl had moved away in preparation.

The shrine maiden was lit by sunlight.

The Non-God Sword’s movements had made the swirling clouds grow even denser, yet the sky was perfectly visible directly over her head.

Plus, even more light was supplied from above the eight hatches.

The black shrine maiden was dancing.

She took gentle yet accurate steps, those steps sounded loudly, and she let her body bounce.

“_____”

The wind roared.

As she moved, the Non-God Sword’s swirling clouds seemed to rumble and cry out.

But some of the onlookers realized that was inaccurate. They lay on the steps from the hatch to the deck, peeked upwards, and slowly measured the timing.

“Is the rhythm of her dance synchronized with the movements of the clouds and wind?”

That was one of the spells of the Ootsubaki-style entertainer gods. One would dance to purify and provide divine protections to the surrounding space. Normally, the spell would apply the theme of the dance to the surrounding space in the form of divine protections and purification, but this was likely different.

“Did she take on the Non-God Sword’s rhythm to interfere with that rhythm!?”

“Heh heh heh. This is only a sword manifestation being distracted by a wolf. No matter how powerful it is, it’s simple at the most basic level. And if you want to swing all those swords around so much, stop trying to fuck the empty air, see how it feels for yourself!”

Kimi laughed.

She kept her eyebrows flat, spun her body, and looked across all of the wind, deck, and sky around her.

She laughed out loud and audibly stepped on the wooden deck. As if reacting to that sound, the wind blew in from multiple locations.

It was flying, but…

“How foolish. You’re just an adorable little child. You were only just born and know nothing of the world.”

As she danced, Kimi spun around and dodged every last one of the wind swords, causing those blades to collide with each other.

“Heh heh. Act tough if you like. I can easily respond in kind. See?”

They shattered.

Countless ice fragments scattered through the wind around the dancing shrine maiden, but not even they reached her. They simply

adorned her dance.

As the range of the sunlight grew, the scattered ice glittered. Kimi smiled and spun within it all. She used her fingertips to draw out the paths of the swirling clouds in advance and her feet touched the deck to match the timing of the Non-God Sword's swaying body and moving legs. Even as she twisted her body, lifted her hips, and embraced her chest, her movements drew out the wind's movement in advance or followed after those movements.

She spoke as her dance sped up.

"You really are hopeless. You haven't lived through even a single night and you've never woken up to find yourself alone. You do not understand the meaning of loneliness or the origin of solitude. I will teach you that a newborn blade can only be put away in its scabbard. Yes, I will teach you so very kindly."

Her movements sped up and new light appeared.

A Shinto spell circle made from a circle of torii shapes rose from her feet. It grew to a diameter of approximately five meters and acted as her footing. Four additional torii-style sign frames appeared behind her. Another large one rose into the sky and displayed an enlarged image of her face.

"I'll go with a reverse-order Ootsubaki-style Foothold Dance. The song will be Star Festival. …Is that okay?"

As soon as she asked that, Uzy clapped on her shoulder and instrument icons appeared in the four sign frames behind her. They shook, added to the sound, tightened in, and yet began playing a song.

Meanwhile, the Non-God Sword roared.

"…!!"

It was a loud, sky-shaking voice, but Kimi had predicted even that great rumbling.

"_____"

She produced a voice of her own. And…

“Try to keep up.”

With that comment, Kimi accelerated. She ruled that spell emblem stage with her dance.

The Non-God Sword stopped in response. With one hundred meters between them, it bent its body as if to combat Kimi’s movements.

“——————!!”

Wind truly appeared in every direction and swept across the deck.

Adele held up a spell shield like an umbrella and looked around the area.

“Wow…”

The entire deck had become a giant clash between a storm and the sunlight.

The Non-God Sword was rapidly launching attacks with its feet stopped on the deck while Kimi loudly faced it with her dance. Adele could see all of their movements, but…

…*Music!*

She could also hear them.

Again and again, the wind crashed down more as a violent wave than a gale and was ultimately smashed into white spray. Kimi continued her composed dance while her sign frames played accompaniment in place of a band.

Her hair danced, her hands and fingers bounced up, and her legs were repositioned without end. When she looked on the verge of falling over, she would add a spin to escape.

“Hey, tomorrow is a summer day, the day of the star festival.”

Adele could hear Kimi's singing voice even through the bursting wind.

"I sigh countless times and send you looks of protest."

The wind crashed and clouds tried to block out the blue of the sky.

"But you seem to hear everything. Everything but me."

Kimi's steps smashed the wind and her swinging arms cleared the sky.

"No matter how close I sit to you."

The wind swords raced forward in unison, but…

"Only the starlight reaches your eyes."

Kimi only had to look back with a smile to crush that wind.

"Fine, then. Tomorrow is a summer day, the night of the star festival."

Adele saw a line of light appear at Kimi's feet.

"I will have you look up to the stars. I will have you mesmerized by them."

Kimi's movements read the Non-God Sword's movement patterns and created them like sheet music.

"Fine, then. Today is a summer day, the night of the star festival."

Adele heard a "la la" from Kimi. It was not related to her movements or anything else. Even the lyrics of the line were meaningless.

"The stars will still be there on the way home."

Kimi added a new movement to the mix.

"They will stand still for you."

She embraced her own body in her arms. She started with the shoulders.

“Fine, then.”

A moment later, Adele saw a violent tremor run through the Non-God Sword’s shoulders and its entire body shook. Kimi’s song, dance, and music had synchronized its ether to herself.

“Today is a summer day, after the star festival.”

When she embraced her own hips, the Non-God Sword’s hips were struck and its ether ruptured.

Also…

“I will have you reach for the stars.”

Kimi wrapped her arms around her shoulders, chest, hips, and body to embrace herself. Each time, the corresponding part of the Non-God Sword was struck and broken.

“I will have you do so forevermore.”

Kimi’s voice rang through the sky. It was a laugh and she then opened her mouth wide.

“La la!”

Rather than pierce through the wind, her voice seemed to push it outward.

Then came the blue.

The clouds covering the sky were parted and a path of sunlight was formed.

As Kimi’s voice spread, so did the path of light between her and the Non-God Sword.

A single figure stood in the center of that path.

“Extra Special Duty Officer!”

It was Mitotsudaira.

She had been enduring the wind before, but now she moved forward.

She used both hands to raise her shield made of ether.

“————!!”

And she collided with the collapsing Non-God Sword’s leg.

The tactile feedback told Mitotsudaira she had destroyed it.

She had made it close enough because Kimi had drawn the enemy’s attacks and then tuned the area to a certain extent.

The sound of shattering glass rang out as the Non-God Sword’s left leg broke.

It crumbled.

Amid the fragments of bursting ether light, Mitotsudaira looked up at the enemy and spoke.

“Well done, Kimi!”

Kimi heard Mitotsudaira’s voice as she continued her dance as a postlude.

…Heh heh. She’s in a good mood.

That may have been because she had reached the enemy and destroyed them despite being a defender. *Maybe she needed to relieve some stress,* thought Kimi, but it was not only thanks to Kimi that Mitotsudaira had reached the enemy.

It took some preparation before she could sing and dance. It had taken some time to read the Non-God Sword’s rhythm and create the stage for the spell.

…And that was only possible because you started forward, Mitotsudaira.

For the first half, Mitotsudaira had drawn the enemy's attention while Kimi prepared. For the second half, Kimi had drawn the enemy's attention while Mitotsudaira continued forward.

That knight has a bad habit of not noticing her own accomplishments due to her guilt about the past.

That isn't what a proper woman does.

I just hope she realizes soon that immersing herself in self-deprecation is holding her back from taking the next step. What does she think she's doing?

"La la…"

Kimi's song finally ended.

She was not out of breath. Rather, the damage to the Non-God Sword and its destroyed leg had caused it to shift from her predicted rhythm.

She would eventually fail if she attempted to rule the stage with the same rhythm as before. And even if she succeeded, that would allow the injured Non-God Sword to recover.

She continued dancing while wondering if she needed to prepare the next dance, but she shrugged when she saw the result in the sunlight up ahead.

"Well, we'll manage somehow. I can take my time and think."

A second strike hit the Non-God Sword and shards of light scattered from the right leg, the one Mitotsudaira had not destroyed.

Kimi shouted to the person who had collided with the leg after racing down the pathway of sunlight.

"Excellent work, Adele!"

Mitotsudaira saw Adele's results.

She had charged straight into the other leg with her shield at the ready.

Adele was not a Shinto musician. She was Catholic. Her spell shield was the reflection type, so her speed was an important factor to its power when ramming something.

Mitotsudaira knew that Adele was just as fast as (if not faster than) Tenzou, the ninja in their class. But…

…Is she okay!?

Adele had picked up too much speed, so she was launched into the sky along with the shards of the Non-God Sword's leg and her own shield. The reflection of her shield had lifted her from the deck.

"Huhhh!?"

Adele spun through the air with an expression that made it clear she had not expected this, so Mitotsudaira reached out a hand.

"_____"

But there was no way she could reach the girl.

Her legs were average and her height was decent for a girl, but not very impressive compared to most of the knights, warriors, and Chancellor's Officers. Needless to say, the reach of her arms and legs were just as unimpressive.

After self-destructing, Adele would have to show her willpower as a vassal when she landed. She was on this Shinto stage despite being Catholic because she needed to earn some money for her daily life. She had apparently recently learned the trick to working on scaffolding and she mainly worked as a mechanic. She had been called here on short notice when they found they needed someone at the last second, but if she hit her head, she would probably be given a decent payout to cover medical expenses, which was sure to

delight her.

At any rate, her attack had been a success.

Both of the Non-God Sword's legs had been broken and its stance had crumbled.

Of course, as a spiritual being, the legs were only for show. The monster primarily moved by floating.

However, its legs had made up a large portion of its structure, so destroying them caused its density to crumble.

Mitotsudaira was fairly certain it would continue to collapse like this, but…

"!!"

The Cerberus cried out at her feet.

…Eh?

It was not the Cerberus's cry that confused her.

That roar had been meant to warn her.

She trusted the small wolf and looked up to see what this was about.

"————!!"

The Non-God Sword was getting up, but not with its legs. It was using its arms.

It had not had any arms before, but now it had six. A sword formed the upper arm and forearm of each one and two on each side acted as crab-like legs.

Mitotsudaira knew what was happening. With its place stolen and its body shattered, it was focusing all of its power on itself. This was self-defense meant to protect its own body instead of self-preservation meant to spread itself into the external world.

An Aki student watching from a hatch described this new form.

“Is that a Gyuki?”

There were some differences in the legends, but that was a monster that appeared on the coast and in the watering holes of the western Far East. It had the body of a spider and the head of a horned ox. Even Musashi had a record of one appearing in Asakusa. And in that case…

“This stagnation must have taken in the Gyuki’s mold too.”

The Non-God Sword had started to crumble, but it had recovered. It lifted itself up, used two blades like arms and used the remaining four like legs.

“…!”

It roared.

However, that roar was immediately crushed.

The Non-God Sword had been destroyed.

Adele saw the light as she lay sprawled out on the deck with her eyes spinning.

A straight line of light pierced diagonally through the Non-God Sword’s raised left arm, chest, and front right leg.

The piercing light stabbed into the deck.

Unlike a flame, the light was focused and it quickly vanished, leaving behind…

…An arrow!

The arrow had flown in from the east. The Tanigawa Castle was floating nearby there. It had initially been quite a bit higher than the Noh Stage so that Adele and the others could jump down, but

now it was only a little bit higher, and…

“Asama-san!”

Asama stood on the edge of the Tanigawa Castle’s deck as she performed the follow-through from firing her bow.

She watched the Non-God Sword crumble after its attempted recovery and then she slowly reached for a new arrow.

“Do not move, Adele. The homing still isn’t great, so I’ll go without it.”

“Just out of curiosity, what would happen if I did move!?”

“If you move, I’ll accidentally target you. …No, I mean this thing will.”

“What!? What do you mean by that!?”

Asama fired regardless.

After destroying the Non-God Sword’s legs with two additional shots, Asama sighed.

She relaxed her shoulders and looked to the scene of the battle where Kimi and Mitotsudaira were smiling and waving at her. She could even tell the Cerberus at Mitotsudaira’s feet was letting down its guard.

That meant the problem had been eliminated.

…*Good.*

She was from the Asama Shrine, Musashi’s main shrine. Aki was managed by Itsukushima Shrine, so she could not easily interfere. Her summary negotiation with Aki had concluded by having her agree not to set foot on Aki land and to instead ‘perform a westward exorcism’ from Musashi land.

If she had failed, she would have interfered with Aki and would be indebted to them.

She had needed to both hit and destroy the target.

There were homing spells for a shrine maiden's arrows, but using the Blessings for that lowered the power. Once she could apply for the rank of upper-level shrine maiden, she would be able to use more efficient methods, but she was still mid-level. She had the power, but she lacked accomplishments.

That was why she had been forced to use non-homing reinforced arrows.

To hit, she had needed line of sight.

She had not expected the Non-God Sword to begin a recovery for self-defense, but Mitotsudaira and Kimi had done a splendid job of guiding her to victory.

They had only had a quick discussion beforehand, but those two and Adele had managed to clear away the wind barrier and then hold the Non-God Sword in place to make it easier to shoot.

Asama watched the crumbling Non-God Sword with Konoha, her left false eye.

She could not tell if the mold at the foundation of its appearance was crumbling as well. If that remained, it was possible another one would appear.

But dealing with that was Aki's job. The work here had revealed the Non-God Sword's ether vibration. If that fixed rhythm was reported to Aki, they could deal with it via purification or sealing.

But besides that…

"So our Extra Special Duty Officer proved useful."

Asama heard a female voice from behind her.

…Is that…?

She looked back and saw a female student in armor standing much closer than expected. She was pretty much right in front of her.

The girl wore a light mobile shell over her summer uniform and held a cowling assault spear in her left hand.

“Vice President.”

The girl that Asama spoke to wore an armband saying, “Vice President: Ookubo Tadayo”.

Vice President Tadayo looked her way, smiled, and shook her longish black hair.

“I should’ve expected that from the Asama Shrine. Maybe I shouldn’t have bothered showing up. …Are Suga and Tsuna here?”

Asama frantically shook her head.

As a member of the Asama Shrine, she knew the Student Council and Chancellor’s Officers, but she did not often speak with the Vice President and this was the first time the girl had spoken to her with a smile.

After shaking her head, Asama thought about the mentioned names.

“Um… No, the Vice Chancellor and 1st Special Duty Officer haven’t-…”

“If you’re looking for the Vice Chancellor, I’m over here.”

A boy sat on the edge of the bow.

He was a thick boy. He had the frame of a log standing on end, a thick wooden sword rested on his lap, and he stared out at the Noh Stage. His armband said “Vice Chancellor: Oosuga Yasutaka” and he placed a hand on his chin as he viewed the other theatre ship.

“The Extra looks happy.”

“That’s because she’s the shield that always heads out first but never reaches the enemy. It’s the same in the Knight League’s mock battles, so I think she gets a little too self-deprecating. It’s to the point that she’s even considerate of a Rank 5 like me.”

“A good superior is considerate of her subordinates.”

“And that’s why I have to head out there.”

Asama understood what Tadayo’s statement meant.

“You mean Musashi’s Chancellor’s Officers and Student Council are all set to deal with this Aki-side trouble?”

“It wasn’t hard getting permission after everything you and the Extra did. If Aki showed up now and crushed the already crumbling Non-God Sword, it would only hurt their reputation. We reached a compromise where we do it for them since it’s a small job and we’re already here.”

“Tadayo. I think you could put that in a nicer way.”

“I don’t want to hear that from a Suwa-style.”

Tadayo smiled bitterly and prepared to leap over to the Noh Stage using the two ships’ height difference, but she suddenly turned toward Oosuga who was still sitting down.

“You come too once Tsuna gets here. Even if it’s for show, we’re acting on the behalf of another academy. You can wait until we have the appropriate materials from the 1st Special Duty Officer.”

“Judge.”

As soon as he replied, Tadayo made her jump.

…*Wow.*

She was a Rank 5 in Musashi’s Knight League. Even as the Vice President, she was militaristic. She soon landed on the Noh Stage which still had some wind remaining.

“_____”

She raised a hand to greet Mitotsudaira and began running.

She sure is fast, thought Asama as she watched the girl’s light step.

“Um, where is the Chancellor and Student Council President?” she asked Oosuga.

“I don’t know where Torii is, but she’s probably playing with Watanabe. The Far East’s Chancellor and President have to be incompetent after all.”

Oosuga returned to the deck as he answered and Asama heard him let out a sigh that could have been in sorrow or relief.

And then…

“What’s with that mature atmosphere you’ve got going on, Suga!? It’s really cool, so take thiiiiiiis!

It happened far too suddenly.

A third year girl roughly wearing a summer uniform took a light step and kicked Oosuga’s large frame right in the butt, knocking him away from the deck.

…Eh?

Asama did not have time to think any further. Oosuga was a large boy, but he had been in the process of standing up. He swayed quite a bit in the direction he had been hit.

“Ohhhhh!?”

After a light cry of doubt, he fell right off the deck.

…Ehh!?

Is he okay? Can you really do that? wondered Asama while the rough girl watched Oosuga fall and let out an impressed “ohhhhh”.

“Hey! Did you see that!?”

She suddenly turned toward Asama.

She was a third year, but she was a little shorter than Asama and she showed off her teeth with a smile.

“This means Musashi’s Vice Chancellor was injured in an accident out here, right!? That should let me and Aki both save face. It’s gotta.”

She had a carefree smile on her face and an armband on her shoulder.

Asama read what was written there: “Chancellor and Student Council President: Torii Mototada”.

In the end, the Non-God Sword was entirely destroyed and command of the scene was returned to Aki thirty-two minutes later.

The falling Vice Chancellor was picked up by a trade ship and only made it back via Aki two hours and fifty-seven minutes later.

When Asama and the others returned, their first stop was the Asama Shrine. By then, it was past 6:30 PM.

Chapter 2: Chicks at Home

CHAPTER 2
"Chicks at Home"
The usual is not supposed to change
But if I change
The usual will also change
Point Allocation (Nighttime Stroll)

The usual is not supposed to change

But if I change

The usual will also change

Point Allocation (Nighttime Stroll)

When moored inside its stealth space, the Musashi was bright even at night.

“It has no real charm, but it isn’t bad if you think of it as scenery exclusive to Musashi.”

Kimi was walking port through Tama’s surface city.

She had returned to her home on Musashino, but as no one was there, she was now on her way to the Tama’s Blue Thunder.

She was hungry.

That was partially due to the questioning at the Asama Shrine after the earlier incident was dealt with.

She had needed to describe the Non-God’s rhythm and movements to Asama and her father and also perform the spell she had used to interfere. Recording those things would provide evidence that the incident had occurred and allow a quicker response the next time something similar happened.

Records of interactions with mysterious phenomena were important.

After all, Non-Gods and other monsters or mysterious phenomena created from changes in ether or ley lines were rare on the manmade Musashi. It had been intentionally designed that way, so Musashi’s Chancellor’s Officers, guards, and religious officials had little experience with them.

Musashi did contain quite a few refugees and immigrants from other nations, so they could always get help from others who had relevant experience.

…But we need to take care of these things on our own. Independence is important.

Kimi looked up at the white sky of the stealth barrier. Also…

“Trade continues at night, so there are sign frames to allow ships in and out…”

More than just hide the Musashi, the stealth barrier buffered against the noise and weather effects such a large object would have simply by floating in the sky. When engaging in trade, ships were let in and out by intermediary spells that opened holes in the barrier without destroying it.

Currently, most of the trade was at Asakusa. Arrows appeared in the sky to guide ships there and a sign frame provided a timetable of arrival and departure times. Occasionally, a transport ship would fly by with a heavy sound.

When Kimi focused her ears, she could even hear the derrick cranes lifting and lowering cargo.

In the past, she had not known what the sound meant and it had scared her at night, but…

“The scariest thing of all was the silence when the ports weren’t running.”

As she smiled bitterly at that old memory, a divine chat sign frame from Asama appeared. The girl was using a prototype divine transmission system designed for Musashi.

Asama: “Kimi, thanks for everything you did today.”

Kimi accepted the sent sign frame as her own.

She formed words verbally rather than typing and she slowed her pace toward Blue Thunder to secure more time.

Wise Sister: “Heh heh. …You did a lot too, so aren’t you tired? I’m perfectly fine, though. So how did it go after I left?”

Asama: “My dad settled the reverse spell issue by saying the Non-

God Sword drew you in and made it that way, so don't worry."

Wise Sister: "Heh heh. I don't mind either way. A mid-level like me shouldn't even be able to pull off a spell that matches the broken rhythm of a stagnation or distortion like a Non-God. …But a reverse conversion is an illegal form of purification, isn't it?"

Asama: "Yes, but my dad said our god will accept the wrong methods as long as your heart is in the right place."

Wise Sister: "Does he really think my heart was in the right place?"

Asama: "He's a fan of yours. At the school year-end festival in March, he was on the front row for your solo dance with one of those, um, glowing sticks. What are those called?"

Wise Sister: "Pleasure rods."

Asama: Oh, right. He was swinging his pleasure rod around."

Wise Sister: "I can't believe this shrine maiden actually said it!!"

"Eh?" said the other girl. And after a while…

Asama: "Ahhhhhhh! An odd meter just shot up! Wait, Hanami! Damage control! You can break the sign frame! Just break it!"

Wise Sister: "You need to calm down, Asama. And this super wise sister will teach you a magic spell to calm you down! Lift your breasts up from below and shout 'dor erusaelp' three times backwards! Now, begin!"

Long story short, three meters filled up and she scolded Kimi.

"Oh, honestly," sent Asama.

However, the sign frame gave her location and it was not the Asama Shrine.

Wise Sister: "You're on your way to Asakusa? Did they find an imported porn game that needs a shrine maiden inspection?"

Asama: “Just to be clear, Toori-kun has calmed down somewhat lately, so the armed shrine maidens and public morals priests haven’t had to board many of the trade ships. I think the last porn game smuggled in was ‘Sneaking in to Meet Imagawa-san for an Early Morning Battle’ back when we were at Mikawa.”

Wise Sister: “I think I remember when that happened. Heh heh. But are you going to Asakusa for that music I can hear?”

Kimi could hear a Gagaku band playing in the distance.

Wise Sister: “Are they rehearsing at Asakusa? Why not on the Tanigawa Castle?”

Asama: “After what happened today, the Buddhist consecration priests are cleaning up the ship. The Tanigawa castle is a Shinto-style shrine, but that’s why some things get overlooked.”

Kimi recognized the song she heard. It was the third most popular band at the previous year’s school festival. They were the infectious death strings unit Plaguer and this was their staple song Black Deathmatch.

“I woke up in the morning and the village was wiped out. I’m the only one alive. Excluded again.

“Everyone’s turned into the Living Dead. I’m the only one feeling sleepy. Left out again.”

“My schoolteacher once said only death cures an idiot.

“So my battle begins here today.

“I’ll stay an idiot forever. I’ll stay an idiot a while longer.

“It’s not like me, but I’ll live on alone.”

She listened to the lyrics and sang quietly along. Lyrics that told a story had become more common lately. From here, the protagonist searched for a way to heal the disease that had wiped out his village, but the healed Living Dead became mere corpses and rested in piece in true death.

“Everyone’s so smart. Digging the graves is up to me.

“Everyone needs to get some sleep. Thanks for staying up so long.

“I know I worried you, but I’m okay now.

“I won’t say I want to die ever again.”

Similar things had supposedly actually happened in Europe during the middle ages.

Kimi felt that songs and dances based on actual experiences and records were something else entirely.

Asama: “Night rehearsals can activate and distort the ley lines, so I was called in as a tuner. But they’re doing it on top of the containers instead of an official stage, so it shouldn’t be much of an issue. How about you stop by later, Kimi? If you tell the guards you’re helping me, they’ll let you through even after curfew. I’m thinking about calling Mito too.”

Wise Sister: “Why is a shrine maiden trying to raise delinquents? Besides, I’m going to eat dinner at my mom’s place and then head home. I don’t know where my foolish brother has gotten off to, but he should be back by then.”

The distant music changed. A four-on-the-floor rhythm on a reinforced tsuzumi had begun.

Wise Sister: “Is that our upperclassmen?”

Asama: “Yes. They’re rehearsing on Asakusa’s third cargo plaza. Want to stop by?”

Wise Sister: “I already said I won’t. But say hi for me, okay? The President has helped me out with the underground flower beds and some other things too.”

Asama: “Torii-san does seem to like you a lot. Since she’s also from the Ootsubaki-style, I bet you enjoy that a lot.”

Kimi considered denying it, but stopped since that was as good as

an admission.

They must have finished tuning their instruments because she heard a voice.

“Hoeeee!”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh. I thought they were done tuning?”

Asama: “It’s best to ignore what Torii-san does. Remember when she went missing when she was appointed President in April? When an El Azor flew by on guard duty, it got caught by the rope she had set up and she swung it around the Musashi while screaming in delight. They didn’t do anything about it to avoid the shame of overlooking the rope, but we couldn’t have complained if they had shot down one of our ships. Toori-kun absolutely loved it, though.”

Wise Sister: “…”

Asama: “Should I not mention Toori-kun and another girl?”

Wise Sister: “It isn’t that. It’s just that my foolish brother has been trying to do the same thing and it’s been a lot of trouble.”

Kimi could hear Torii’s song. She was pretty sure its title was Routine and Torii’s voice arrived clearly from the distance.

“Let’s head out into the night. Into the city. Just like always. Nothing changes.

“We can all do it. I can do it. The sky surrounds us. The night surrounds us.

“My outstretched arms cannot reach the surrounding cage.

“I extend them into the night, but no shade falls on them.

“As long as I have my song and my dance

“The night’s usual atmosphere will invite me out once more.”

What a sarcastic song, thought Kimi.

The Far East was under the provisional rule of the other nations. They had lost the Harmonic Unification War and been placed under the rule of the other nations as well as constrained by the academy system.

That rule restricted them and left them unable to fight back, but…

…*We can't touch those restrictions.*

As long as they did not seek political equality or try to reach the same level as the other nations, the Far East would have peace. The Far East's Student Council President and Chancellor would normally be the leader of their army, but to escape the other nations' suspicion, it was customary to appoint someone "incompetent" to that position. This year, that was Torii.

That may have been why she sang this as the Far East's leader.

"Let's dance in the night. In the city. Just like always. Nothing changes.

"Anyone can do it. Even I can do it. Look up into the sky and see through the night.

"And if my embraced heart desires to leave that surrounding

"That heart will surpass its racing pulse.

"Just like normal and just like always

"The night gives me another push forward."

Kimi commented on the song she heard.

Wise Sister: "The Apocalypse's limit is coming next year, but just how 'incompetent' is this President really?"

That's a good question, thought Asama concerning Kimi's comment.

She was currently on Asakusa. She stood on some cargo stacked up

higher than the deck. The large wooden containers were stacked along some guiderails and their tightly-packed top surface created a large open space.

These were commonly known as cargo plazas and this one was behind the third derrick from the front. Hence, it was known as the third plaza.

Asama watched the rehearsal.

Even when packed together, the containers did not provide an entirely flat surface. One raised area was being used as a stage with the others acting as audience seats.

The plaza was two hundred meters square.

Beyond that, the containers were stacked even higher or missing, but Festival Committee members were inspecting audio equipment and lights on the higher stacks. When they noticed her, they greeted her.

One of them was an upperclassman who worked part-time as a shrine maiden and she spoke to Asama from the edge of a container.

“Another five groups are performing. They’re not going all out today, so it should be over before long.”

“That’s good to hear. It gives me less tuning to manage.”

A familiar duo landed on the stage. They caught everyone off guard by suddenly descending from the sky. The host introduced them.

“Next up is the new second year unit Eisen! The duo is made up of Margot Naito and Malga Naruze. They’ve flown in from the sky while also advertising for their delivery business! They have three songs prepared for us today!”

Can’t they let a second year be the MC? wondered Asama, but letting Naruze speak would only lead to a series of unpleasant remarks.

…Oh, but there are actually a lot of people who like that these days.

Naito had a guitar and a spell xylophone while Naruze had a viola. The other music was supplied by Technohexen spells. The beat of the spells was stronger and their instruments were sometimes used in place of their voices.

Naito opened her mouth.

“When I woke up in the morning, you weren’t next to me.”

Naruze followed by moving her lips.

“All I found was lost intimacy in my arms.”

“What should I do today? I have work to do too.”

“This daily life is no longer just an obligation.”

The two of them had joined the delivery business after entering high school, so they were busy with that as well as the races between the others in the business. Naruze also drew doujinshi as a hobby. True to her M.H.R.R. origins, she strived for “realism” and thus real people were made the victims.

On the stage, they used subdued movements to swap positions and swing their instruments around. Asama could clearly see the difference in experience between them and the third years.

It felt bad to call them “nervous”, but they seemed unsure how much they should show off.

It had even taken Asama a while to realize she should not worry about her surroundings during her shrine work. The world was all about skill, but not many people could truly control their own power well enough to let it out properly. And that included Mitotsudaira who had grown more focused on defense.

“I guess it’s the people who can do that that end up on the Student Council or Chancellor’s Officers.”

This time next year, it would be her class’s turn.

She wondered how that would turn out but knew she was getting

ahead of herself. She then opened a sign frame to search the surrounding ley lines and begin tuning.

“Oh, the westward flow is a little strong…”

Not even the stealth barrier stopped the flow of the ley lines. When the Non-God Sword had appeared and been destroyed, quite a bit of ether had been scattered. That ether would eventually return to the ley lines, but the ley lines had grown more active to fill the temporary gap.

If the ley lines in the western sky were active, Asama felt the Gagaku Festival could succeed despite the Non-God Sword disaster.

But it was true the incident had affected the Musashi’s ether fuel pathways, so she would create a map showing the direction of activity and where the greatest burden would fall. Once complete, she would send the map to Musashino’s bridge.

She summoned Hanami, showed her an example, and then split up the work with her. The music rehearsal helped. The cargo and containers of the cargo plaza were relatively unaffected by the ley lines, so she could easily pick out just the areas influenced by the music.

She had a feeling she could finish this before the rehearsal ended.

“So we meet again, Miss Tits!”

A sudden voice called out to her and someone groped her breasts from behind.

Eh? thought Asama while briefly left unable to react. She only knew one person who did things like this.

…Toori-kun!?

No, the voice had not been his. It had been a girl’s voice and she had recognized it.

“President!?”

“Hi.”

Asama turned around and found Torii carrying a bamboo pole microphone on her back. Vice President Tadayo and Vice Chancellor Oosuga stood behind her, as did…

…*Um, who is that girl with the spear?*

When she looked over, the blonde girl bowed while holding a metal spear with a microphone attached.

“I’m 1st Special Duty Officer Watanabe Moritsuna. The Asama Shrine does a lot of business with my mom’s shop.”

“Oh.” Asama recalled the shop on Oume’s third underground floor. “You mean Nabe Style, the cookware shop? Thank you for all the Orei Metallo equipped cookware.”

“No, no. Thank you. That’s how we make money.”

Watanabe raised her lowered head and Asama looked to the four Chancellor’s Officers and Student Council members in front of her.

The Treasurer and Secretary positions were held by the heads of the Industrial Committee and Public Relations Committees. The rest of the Special Duty Officers doubled as committee leaders and second-in-commands, so these four were the main force of Musashi’s current Student Council and Chancellor’s Officers.

The four of them had apparently known each other since elementary school.

…*They’re a lot like us.*

Just like Asama’s Class 2-Plum, Torii’s Class 3-Plum had mostly been together since elementary school.

That may have been Principal Sakai’s doing.

Interested in the instruments all four held, Asama asked a question.

“Your band is called Kagami, isn’t it?”

“Judge,” replied Oosuga while adjusting his grip on a large torii-necked biwa. “This idiot asked us for some help since she didn’t know much about the Gagaku played at the festival her own family’s shrine puts on. That was how it all started three years ago.”

“It was four years and three months ago, Suga-kun.”

“Is that so, Watanabe? We’ve been doing it that long, have we? … Even if we weren’t taking it too seriously, I guess you get pretty good when you’ve been at it for four years and three months.”

“Hah,” laughed Vice President Tadayo. Her stage armor made quiet noises as she moved. “You say that, but you’ve practiced more than any of us, Suga. …You know what?”

Tadayo turned toward Asama.

“That guy actually writes the lyrics for the love songs since Torii’s no good at that.”

“You’re the ones that asked me to do it. Laugh at me for it and I’ll never do it again.”

“Calm down.” Tadayo slapped Oosuga on the back and faced Asama again. “Do you think it’s funny he wrote those songs?”

“Eh? Well, um, I don’t know which ones that would be…”

“Ones like Mismatch or Flower Day.”

…Wow, I really like those songs!!

“U-um, I’ve been wondering something about the line ‘And the world tastes like tears’ at the end of Chicken Stun. Is that because chicken is salty? Or am I supposed to read a little deeper and say reality is better with tare?”

“Miss Tits, did you forget that shichimi is an option too?”

“I didn’t think of that.”

She decided to keep that in mind next time she was eating some chicken to go with her sacred sake.

But Tadayo and Torii must have noticed her reaction because they both slapped Oosuga on the back.

Torii went a step further and continued slapping his back.

“Way to go, Suga! I’ll leave that to you next time too! You really know how to think like a girl in love!”

“You shove anything troublesome onto me, don’t you?”

“But love songs are too embarrassing.”

“Then don’t ask me to write them!!”

Asama tilted her head at that.

“You find it embarrassing, Vice Chancellor?”

“I do, I do.” Tadayo faced her. “Can you really emotionally say ‘I love you’ or ‘I adore you’ in front of a crowd?”

“Eh?”

Asama thought about singing “I love you” or “I adore you” as the lyrics to a song.

There were words of congratulations in Shinto prayers, but on a more personal level…

…I do say that kind of thing pretty loudly.

For a shrine maiden who utilized the power of words, words related to emotions and willpower were important. Mass-producing them or saying them to no one in particular was indecent, but…

“…”

As she imagined it, heat rose from her neck to her cheeks.

If it was not nighttime, everyone would have seen her blushing. However, she was not sure why. She had no feelings like that at the moment.

But if she were singing about emotions that were normally kept hidden…

…I would have to reveal those feelings in myself. And for real.

She would have to seriously say “I love you” or “I adore you” to the audience.

But the audience would not be revealing anything of themselves. They were only there to listen and watch.

She would be the only one revealing her feelings with no one to reciprocate.

She would need to think about it differently to get used to it, plus she had no experience doing that.

She had fallen silent, but Tadayo smiled a little and slapped Oosuga’s belly.

“What do you think, Suga?”

“I would never feel ashamed by what I’m presenting to the world.”

He did not hesitate to answer.

He’s the real deal! thought Asama while Torii raised her right thumb behind Oosuga.

Asama then saw some lights around Torii. They were fragments of ether light.

…Those surround Kimi during her spell dances.

Torii was an Ootsubaki-style shrine maiden. The Ootsubaki-style focused on entertainment and was based in Mikawa, so it fell under the Asama Shrine’s management on the Musashi.

Ootsubaki-style shrine maidens generally gained their power from Mikawa using the Asama Shrine as an intermediary, but Torii had a direct contract that did not go through the Asama Shrine.

Her power grew weaker the further the Musashi was from Mikawa, but the direct contract gave her more plentiful spells and reduced the cost and effort of the contract.

And Torii had taken measures to combat the weakness that grew with distance.

…When we were in Mikawa this spring, she became an authorized high-level shrine maiden.

To avoid friction with the other nations, Musashi's Chancellor and Student Council President had to be incompetent.

Torii was no exception and she had won the previous Student Council election and passed a test for the Chancellor's Officers.

Even so, on their stop in Mikawa during her third year, she had passed her high-level shrine maiden test at Ootsubaki Shrine.

She had gotten ahead of Asama in that way.

Asama was trying to gain high-level qualifications at the Asama Shrine for next year, but regardless of the shrine, achieving high-level was not easy. Torii waved her hand to manipulate the ether light created by her high-level spell dance.

"I only got this with everyone's help."

"That's because you chose two practical skill tests for the elective subjects on the Ootsubaki high-level test. The Chancellor's Officers and Student Council were absent for the entire day. We would've been in trouble if it wasn't at Mikawa."

"Um… The Testament Union wasn't upset about that?"

Tadayo waved a hand dismissively at Asama's honest question.

"Torii only has dance and music spells. No matter what happens,

dance and music are over when they're over. They're really only useful for festivals or cheering people up. Since they aren't permanent, the Testament Union actually sees them as a way of letting Musashi let off some steam. Also…"

Also…

"Torii has an inherited name."

"Eh?"

Asama's confusion was not about Torii having an inherited name. She did not know what that had to do with the Testament Union's reaction.

But her upperclassmen did not respond. Tadayo simply began groping Torii's breasts through the scant material left on the chest of the girl's modified uniform.

"How did you get an inherited name when you're just an idiot who's only good for entertainment? Was it these indecent breasts?"

"Ohhhh! A little higher, Tada-yon. Higher, higher. Ahhh, yes, yes. There, there. Aheen!"

"Don't moan like that, Chancellor!!"

After nodding at Oosuga's jab, Torii smiled and fixed her uniform's bikini-style chest.

"I can't help it. My body's just too honest. But anyway, I can't believe I passed that test. …For the practical skill part, Nabe calculated out the relationship between the pass rate over the last two hundred years with the odds of a wardrobe malfunction. I think it was something like a wardrobe malfunction increases your odds by thirty percent or something. But I was doing well, so I didn't do it."

Torii nodded and pointed at Asama's chest.

“When you’re taking your high-level test next year, letting those giant things slip out will up your odds by thirty percent! Remember that, okay!?”

“Mine’s a Sakuya-style shrine…”

That might be useful for Kimi to know though, she thought as Watanabe lightly raised a hand.

“You three, we need to give our report to festival HQ before long.”

They would review the information on the acoustics and output during their time on stage. The students in charge were impatiently waving at them from the bench and inspection equipment on the starboard side.

On the stage containers up front, Naito and Naruze had finished their rehearsal and were receiving some information via sign frame from the student in charge of the stage.

The rehearsal was making progress.

Tadayo said “see you,” Oosuga nodded, and Watanabe took the lead. Torii started to follow, but…

“Asamakko.”

She called out to Asama, turned around, and continued walking backwards.

“I called you that on a whim, but now that I think about it, it’s one letter off from something pretty outrageous.”[1]

“Um, if I agreed, it would fill up a meter, so can I ignore that?”

“Sure, sure.” Torii nodded with a serious look on her face. “Anyway, Asaman.”

“Wh-why are you getting even closer to that dangerous word!?”

“Umm, this is a Chancellor’s order.”

…What kind of Chancellor's order begins with "umm"?

As Asama wondered what it could be, Torii continued.

"After what happened today, one band is dropping out. About three people on the Aki side can't perform now, so our mainly Italian band 'ROMulus and REMus' will be filling the holes in Aki's lineup. Yeah, they're the ones with MC section that goes on forever."

So…

"You sounded pretty good today, so how about you take part as a band?"

"…Eh?"

She understood what she was being told, but she could not grasp it. So…

"W-wait. What do you-…?"

"Judge. I'm sure someone like you can find some random band members. And since you can tune, you won't affect the overall tuning by joining in and you can keep things safe if something does happen. …We'll put you in somewhere in the center. If you can do it, send me the form by the day before."

Bye.

"Think about making a band, okay? I want to hear it a little, got it?"

Mitotsudaira was fixing her hair before going to bed, but she was interrupted by a suspicious divine transmission. It was from Asama and it was in Asama's voice, but…

"M-Mi-Mi-Mi-Mito…Mi-Mi-Mi-Mi-to-to-to-to-to-to. Miiiito. Miiiito."'

"Tomo! Tomo! Are you rapping about meat!? You are, aren't you!? But this isn't like you! What happened!? Did all those years finally

catch up with you and fry your brain!?”

“What do you mean by that!? Um, uh, but!? Listen!”

As a werewolf, Mitotsudaira had divine protections to take care of her hair, so she could easily stop brushing. However…

“Um, wait. Could I finish brushing my hair first?”

“Ehhh!? W-wait. N-no, it’s just that. Um, uh, brushing? Bru-br-br… band!”

“Breast band? Is that supposed to be a challenge, Tomo?”

“No….eh!? Oh, th-that’s not what I…um…”

Asama took a breath before continuing.

“Meet me below the academy bridge at six tomorrow morning! I have something to tell you!”

The divine transmission ended.

Mitotsudaira was briefly dazed by the conversation and its sudden end, but after some thought, she reached a certain conclusion.

…A confession!?

Mitotsudaira felt her blood rising from her neck to her cheeks for no real reason.

Her brushing hand picked up speed.

“Eh? W-wait? Could it be?”

With no one else in the mansion, Mitotsudaira frantically tried to confirm her thoughts.

She searched for someone to talk to.

“Cerberus…”

The three-headed wolf was sleeping sprawled out in the center of the bed.

…Oh, I might have to sleep on the floor or the sofa tonight.

Sensing her defeat, she looked around again.

But there was of course no one around to speak to, so she asked herself the question instead.

“Wh-what is going on?”

Why was Asama trying to confess to her?

Normally thinking…

…It could of course be about love, but it can also be about someone to support you in the future.

But Asama was a shrine maiden.

Shrine maidens offered themselves up to their god in body and soul, so they generally lived in a world of abstinence. She did not know how that worked in practice, though.

But she did know a shrine maiden lost their exclusivity with their god when they married and offered themselves up to another. That normally meant a restriction to their power, so…

…Does she want a “marriage” between girls to gain someone to support her without losing her divine power?

“O-oh, right! I read about this in Naruze’s book!!”

She had a feeling that book was not the most credible source, but with how ridiculously well “Asama Shoots – Pilot Edition” was selling, it had to be something the general public would accept. It was safe.

But how had this happened? She could only think of one possibility.

“Was it because I showed off my good side during that battle

today!? Was that it!?”

Destroying the Non-God Sword’s leg had been a delight for Mitotsudaira since she generally acted on defense.

…Oh, but Tomo uses a bow and arrow and arrows are a metaphor for men. If a shield is a metaphor for women…

“Women are a shield, so, um, the chest is…”

She decided not to think about it.

But in that moment of thought, she felt like those metaphors for men and women fit together in her brain. In other words, even when restraining from such things, a shrine maiden was still 50% sexual. And if Asama was willing to act at 50%, she saw no reason not to go for a full 100%, but she decided not to think about that either.

At any rate, she had to figure out what to do. She needed to come up with a strategy concerning the coming confession, but her experience points were far too low. So she tried to think of someone with more experience.

…That would be a bad idea.

Kimi was too dangerous. And it would frighten her if Adele had any experience with that. Heidi had gone full circle and become a slave to money, and she had a feeling Naomasa would dodge the issue even if she asked. Naito and Naruze had reached the finish line together, but that seemed somehow different. That left…

…Mother?

“Sh-she’s the most dangerous one of all!!”

Her mother was a very bad idea. She had to avoid her at all costs.

She had often been told the story of how her parents had fallen in love, but that had clearly followed the following sequence: Devour → Docking → Fusion → Enlightenment. When she tried counting it all up, that battle had apparently lasted more than twenty days, but

they obviously could not do that under the academy bridge. As much as Naruze would love it if they did. In that case…

“Honda Masazumi…”

What about that crossdressing girl that transferred in this year? she wondered.

“She doesn’t have a handheld shrine, does she?”

She was paying her own tuition, so she had not had enough money to pay for sign frame service. That only left…

“…My king?”

She opened a sign frame and called him, but…

“Huh!? Nate!? Oh, wait a second. I’m about to drop my spoon!”

What are you doing!? she thought, but she cleared her throat before speaking aloud and checked his location.

…The Blue Thunder?

Kimi viewed the scenery below the dim white sky.

A dozen meters ahead, she saw the lights of a café/bakery.

It was the Blue Thunder.

The door opened and a boy stepped out.

…Toori?

That was her younger brother.

Their mother ran the Blue Thunder and there was no real problem with him leaving it. That was, of course, only if one ignored the fact that he had not gone there for nearly nine years now.

…I had heard he’s been coming here lately.

Seeing it for herself piqued her curiosity.

…What could this mean?

Her brother had stopped visiting here nine years before for a certain reason, but now he was suddenly back. And from what she could see, he was carrying back a bag filled with bread for dinner.

Without noticing her, he left while speaking into a sign frame by his face. He made his way port, toward Musashino.

He was apparently going home.

However, Kimi came to a stop.

She was to the right of the road and she was glad that did not place her behind a building. She was also glad that her brother was distracted by the sign frame.

That meant she was not hiding and that he was not ignoring her.

She began moving again. She looked inside the Blue Thunder up ahead. She wondered if the reason for her brother's return lay inside.

"Heh. That isn't what a proper woman does. Don't sneak around, Aoi Kimi."

After calming her breathing while taking two steps, she walked boldly through the Blue Thunder's door and spoke.

"Mom… Dinner."

A bathhouse existed on one of Okutama's underground residential long blocks.

It belonged to the Mukai family and the attendant booth was generally manned by their daughter.

"Huh? Suzu-chan isn't here today?"

The male guests all asked the same question when they saw the mother sitting at the attendant booth. The woman smiled bitterly.

“She’s tending to a guest who passed out in the bath.”

“Oh, that’s too bad…”

“Oh, that’s really too bad…”

“Oh, that’s really, really too bad…”

“Hey, Suzu! The guests are getting depressed, so can you step out here real quick?”

Quiet footsteps soon followed and a small form left the changing room for the women’s bath. The girl had long bangs and a ponytail. She used the sensors on her ears and waist to make up for her lack of sight.

She hesitantly tilted her head toward the men’s bath.

“…Nn. Wh-what…is it?”

The men all exchanged a glance.

“…”

They silently stood tall and slowly bowed.

The mother nodded and placed a hand on Suzu’s head.

“Thanks, Suzu. You can head back now.”

“Eh? Eh?”

“Go on.” The mother smiled at Suzu’s confusion. “Tomo-san collapsed, right? She summons our ignition and heat control spells, so we can’t ignore her. Continue looking after her.”

Asama lay on a bench at one end of the changing room. She wore a yukata, a clothes basket sat upside down on her head, and she

slowly calmed her breathing.

…*Hmm*…

The hard points on her neck, sides, and waist tuned her blood flow and ether. There was no point in using any Blessings to speed up the process, so she was using a slower recovery based on her metabolism.

As her heated body calmed down, she just about fell asleep.

“U-um, Asama…-san. …Would you like…c-coffee milk or…fruit milk?”

“Oh, thanks. I’ll take the fruit.”

She slowly sat up while accepting a bisque ceramic bottle with a hemp straw sticking out.

She took time to drink the milk. For the time being, she drank about half.

…*Now I’m feeling better.*

She did not remember much after Torii had asked her to perform in a band on Asakusa. She had wanted a relaxing place to gather her thoughts, so she had chosen Suzu’s bathhouse. However, soaking in the warm water seemed to have released everything in her mind.

She had a vague recollection of contacting Mitotsudaira while in the tub, but she did not remember what she had said. A memo from Hanami said they had agreed to meet below the academy bridge at six the next morning, so she guessed that was to invite the werewolf girl to join her band.

Now that she had calmed down, she could tell she intended to do this.

The shrine maiden of the Asama Shrine who represented Musashi’s Shinto was going to perform “common” music rather than Gagaku.

That would probably cause some accusations and other problems,

so…

“…”

Asama turned toward Suzu. Suzu must have sensed it as she sat politely in her wide-sleeved summer uniform.

“?”

The girl tilted her head quizzically, which Asama took to mean she should continue.

…Suzu-san can be ignorant in a good way, so she’ll give you a straight answer.

“Um, Suzu-san?”

“Hm? Wh-what?”

“What do…”

She hesitated but tried asking. She used a speaking technique to add directionality to her voice so the guests changing around her could not hear.

“What do you think about me in a band?”

“You can’t.”

The girl immediately responded.

…Uuh…

Asama groaned in her heart.

She had expected this answer, but it still did not feel good. It left her enthusiasm dead in the water.

Suzu must have noticed her speaking technique because she brought her knees in closer, raised her eyebrows a little, and leaned forward as she continued.

“You said…you wouldn’t… No bands.”

…Y-yeah.

When she had been stricter in the past, she did remember forcing herself to say that kind of thing.

Wait, but that was because I wanted to distinguish myself from the others. That’s the key to being a cute girl… Oh, but I’m still a cute girl. I am. Right? But, um…

“You…promised,” said Suzu. “No bands.”

“…Eh?”

…Did I ever go so far in my anti-band talk to make an actual promise?

If she had, this was bad.

To earn Blessings for her spells, she had placed a few restrictions on herself as substitutions. One of those was to never break a promise. Permanent promises were efficient because they would continue providing Blessings as long as she kept them, but a promise had to be approved before it worked as a substitution. Everyday promises would not make the cut, but…

…Promising not to join a band would have been approved.

If she had used a promise like that for a substitution, getting it rescinded would be difficult. It would also reduce the amount of Blessings she earned on a daily basis, so she would have to rethink her personal Blessings management.

Promise substitutions held for years gained a perfect attendance bonus, so losing that substitution could require making several restrictions to fill the gap.

I hope it wasn’t an old promise, she thought as she tried asking.

“Um, Suzu-san? When did I make that promise?”

“Elementary…school. …F-fourth grade?”

…That's old!!

That was seven years ago and she would have been ten at the time. It did not reach the twelve-year mark, but it was over five years.

In the Shinto substitution plans, even the standard "Easy Promise Substitution Plan" gained a substitution bonus at three and five years. As a shrine maiden, she would get more Blessings than a normal person and she might have even gotten a bonus at seven years.

Oh, no, she thought in silent shock. *Making up for the loss of a promise substitution like that would require adding on five additional restrictions.*

She had already taken on all of the most efficient substitutions. For example:

- **Periodically dedicate sake to your god using your own body. (1 Bottle/3 Days)**
- **Periodically dedicate grilled chicken to your god using your own body. (5 Skewers/3 Days)**
- **Never drink happoshu.**

…Hmmm? This almost looks like I just want to drink…

Just for reference, she decided to check the list for someone else whose contract she managed. She was curious what it was like for them.

…Um, how about Kimi?

- **Dedicate a dance for four hours every day.**
- **Get eight hours of sleep a day.**
- **Maintain a bodyweight of less than 48 kg.**

…What!? Is she an athlete!? And how can she possibly look like that at less than 48 kg!?

She was in charge of this contract, so this lapse in memory may have come from her trying not to look at that cruel reality. *Anyway, I need to check someone else,* she thought.

…What was Toori-kun's like again?

- **Periodically strip. (1 Time/3 Days)**
- **Periodically crossdress. (1 Time/3 Days)**
- **Periodically make strange noises. (1 Time/1 Day)**

"…"

Even if she was in charge of this contract, she had to wonder if this just made him a crazy person.

She also wondered if she was partially responsible for setting him in that strange direction, but she decided to ignore that possibility since his rate of stripping was easily thirty times the rate required.

"But…"

What about her? There was a lot to her contract and it was all complexly intertwined, so checking would be difficult. So…

"Um, Suzu-san? What exactly did I promise?"

"Nn. Y-you promised Toori-kun…no bands…"

"I promised Toori-kun!?"

"Y-yes… Judge."

She would never have guessed it was a promise to him. But…

…Toori-kun suggested I start a band…

In that case, would it even count as breaking her promise? She decided to check the details of the contract later and asked Suzu a question.

"U-um, h-how exactly did that, um, promise with Toori-kun go?"

“Eh?”

Suzu seemed surprised.

Had it been that important a promise? Asama started sweating at the fact that she did not remember it at all, but she gathered her courage and asked.

“Well, it seems I’ve, uh, completely forgotten how that promise went, so could you maybe tell me?”

“A-are you sure?”

“Eh? Y-yes. I asked, so I can’t exactly complain.”

“Then,” said Suzu as she slowly got up and circled behind her. “A-are you sure? H-here I go. This was the promise.”

“Eh? Oh, okay. Go ahead.”

“Nn. I’m playing…Toori-kun’s role, okay?”

Just as a very bad feeling came over Asama, Suzu stuck her hands below her arms and began groping her breasts with a strong but inexperienced grip.

She squeezed them.

…Eh?

Asama gasped at the sudden occurrence and Suzu's mouth trembled.

"Wh-when you were…wearing a band…Toori-kun, um, said shrine maidens…aren't supposed to…wear bras. He groped you…while crying."

"I did promise not to wear any breast bands, didn't I!?"

At that very moment, Naito and Naruze stepped through the cloth divider into the changing room.

"Oh?" Naito's eyebrows rose. "Huh? You're here, Asama-chi?"

As for Naruze…

"We don't often run into you here at this time of-…"

As soon as Naruze saw Suzu groping Asama's breasts through her disheveled yukata, she froze in place and dropped the viola case she was holding.

"…Ah, Ga-chan?"

Naruze turned extremely slowly toward Naito's question. Then she nodded.

"I'm okay, Margot. I'm okay. I'm A-OK. See?"

As soon as she nodded, two beams of blood shot from her nose.

"Waaah! Are you okay, Naruze!?"

The Weiss Hexen responded to Asama's question by covering half of her face with her right hand. Blood dripped down with enough force to be heard and she gave a wave of her other hand that said, "Don't worry about it."

She then spent two seconds audibly sucking air in through her nose.

“Khah… Whether I’m fine doesn’t matter. I want to know what the two of you are doing!”

“Nn.” Suzu calmly nodded. “Asama-san…had forgotten her promise…s-so I was playing T-Toori-kun.”

“So it was by force!? You were forcing it onto her!? Asama was lonely, so you came at her saying ‘If you’ve forgotten our promise…’ ”

“Um…”

“This will work! I wasn’t sure what to do after the pilot edition, but now I know just where to take it! Herrlich!!”

“Wait, um…”

“Shut up. I need to make a detailed rough!”

Naruze rubbed her finger in the blood from her nose and began drawing out a storyboard on her viola case.

What am I supposed to do about this? wondered Asama.

“Um, uh, Suzu-san? You can stop groping me now.”

“Wait!! I’m still drawing, so don’t stop!! Stay like that until I’ve finished my sketch!! Please! This might become a regular source of income for me!”

“I’m not sure I want that…”

“More importantly, Suzu! Dig your fingers in a little more and lift them up! Yes, so I can see, so I can see. Good. Now stop breathing… and breathe out…and stop! Yes!”

“Why are you giving them a physical, Ga-chan?”

Naruze responded to Naito by wiping off her hand and grabbing her partner’s breasts. “Ohh,” said Naito as Naruze lifted them two or three times and looked to the storyboard on the viola case.

After a beat, she nodded and spoke.

“Okay! …Okay! I was just about to get the feel of it all wrong! Seeing ones as big as hers threw off my sense of perspective!!”

Naruze nodded again and added a “judge”, but that sent a second eruption of blood from her nose.

Naito cried out and frantically pulled out a healing charm. It scared Asama how practiced the action seemed.

As Naruze said “oh, dear” far too casually, Asama raised a hand.

“Um, Naruze, this is someone else’s home, you know?”

“If it’s coming out, it’s coming out. I can’t help it. I do need to get in the bath to wash the blood off, though.”

“But,” said Naito as she removed her shoes and tilted her head. “What’s this about a promise, Asama-chi?”

“Nn. …No bands.”

“Oh, that promise with Too-chan. You haven’t worn a bra since, right?”

“That’s private information! Stop revealing all my private information!! …And that isn’t the point.”

The three other girls tilted their heads.

“What do you think about me in a band?”

She wanted to know as a shrine maiden.

She had made a show of disliking such things, so this was a change of policy. How would they view that?

“What do you think about that idea?”

After Asama sked, the two Technohexen exchanged a glance.

Asama then heard Naruze speak first.

“How about you ask again after you find one that actually fits you?”

“When you aren’t used to it, the lines can be noticeable over your clothes, so you need to be careful.”

“Y-you need…T-Toori-kun’s p-permission.”

“N-no, not that kind of band. A-and Suzu-san, you can protest just as well without groping me.”

What am I supposed to do about this? she complained in her heart.

Apparently they had a hard time linking the word “band” with a group of performers when it came to her. She decided to choose her words more carefully.

“I’m talking about a musical band.”

“Do any instrument brands make bras, Ga-chan?”

“Asama is pretty crazy, so she might be thinking of making a bra out of trumpet horns.”

“T-Toori-kun did that…on his crotch…before…”

They think I’m like him? thought Asama while feeling a little depressed.

…Hmm.

This is hopeless, she thought while not quite sure what exactly was hopeless.

It seemed simply impossible for them to think of her in a band. In that case, she would never get a clear answer when asking them about the possibility.

…Maybe it would feel better to actually form a band and surprise them all.

Yes, she decided. *I’ll invite Kimi and Mito to form a band tomorrow.*

She took a breath and Naito tossed a Magie Figur her way. She took it as Naito removed her side skirt and loosened the collar of her inner suit.

“This is from before.”

“Before?”

“Judge. It’s the footage of our rehearsal. With audio. It looked like the President captured you and discussed some things with you, so I thought you might not have gotten a chance to listen to it.”

Naruze cut in while undoing her hair next to Naito.

“We’re in there with the third years, so there’s some real pressure on us. We need to spread this everywhere to let everyone know we’re doing this and raise the internal pressure,” she said. “But you might not be interested in this kind of thing.”

“Eh!? Um, well…”

Asama thought about her past self and her current self.

Her past self would have congratulated Naruze and Naito for the chance to perform, but she would not have accepted this. But now…

…U-um…!

“Yeah, Asama-chi has always had trouble with this kind of thing.”

Naito prepared to pull back what she had tossed Asama’s way.

“…!”

But Asama grabbed Naito’s spell circle as if snatching it away.

Oh? thought Naruze.

…Asama has changed a lot this year too.

In elementary school, a certain girl had had great power with her spells, but she had been unsure whether she should use that power or not. She had often been with an idiot and his sister. It had seemed like the other two would play around without restraint, but that girl had become a strange sort of safety device or stopper for them.

In middle school, she had been something of a prodigy who had gained her official qualifications as a shrine maiden at a rate not often seen in the entire history of the academy. But her stricter side had been counteracted by always being with the idiot and his sister.

…But deep down, she took everything seriously.

Even when someone wanted to be left alone, Asama would decide to say what she had to say. Even if that hurt someone or distanced them from her, she was tough enough to accept it as a natural part of being a shrine maiden, regardless of what she actually thought.

If she had been on the side of the religious officials during the Technohexen hunt, she would have been dangerous indeed.

She prioritized her decisions as a shrine maiden over her own personal decisions. That was how Naruze viewed Asama.

She was the perfect person if you got along with her or found a convenient connection with her.

For Naruze, she was someone she could tease and get warnings from without worrying too much. But…

“Do you want to listen to our Technohexen music?”

“Asama-chi, what kind of music do you listen to at home?”

“Eh? W-well, um, things like Plaguer, Kagami, or Girl Viewer…”

She seemed to have the major ones covered. The lack of idols suggested her tastes were similar to Naruze’s. So…

“We can probably leave that with you then.”

“Eh? Um, are you sure?”

“Judge, judge. Margot gave it to you, so it’s not my place to decide.”

She loosened her collar and finally relaxed.

If it turned out someone like Asama understood their tastes, should she be happy or should she try to keep her distance? Asama’s reactions were too much of an unknown to say for sure, but…

“It is nice finding someone who shares your tastes.”

Kimi spoke inside the Blue Thunder.

She sat at the further back of two tables. There were not many customers at this time, but…

“Well? I heard from Toori that you had some fun outside today.”

A woman sat in the seat diagonally across from her. She was the Blue Thunder’s manager and Kimi’s mother.

She had removed her usual mitts and scarf and she looked to Kimi while resting her head in her hand. She showed off her teeth and seemed unwilling to overlook Kimi’s expression.

But Kimi did not try to oppose her. She crossed her legs in her summer uniform and held out her right palm.

“Mitotsudaira charged in like this. And then I…”

She made a humanoid figure with her left hand and twisted it around.

“I used my dance to get rid of the…would you call it a storm barrier? Mitotsudaira took out one leg and then Adele…”

“Wait a minute. Where did Adele come from?”

“I’m bad at explaining things, so go easy on me. She was there for a

part-time job and got dragged into it. She can make a good charge, so…”

“She got blown away a little, didn’t she?”

“How did you know?”

Kimi smiled bitterly. Her mother knew most of the students who came here. She could recognize them and she knew their various traits.

…She was a real samurai, after all.

“Maybe she should add some weight anchors to her leg guards. Also, she needs to get some proper supplies for when she goes running with those dogs.”

“Tell her that yourself next time she stops by for some bread crust. …Anyway, with both legs destroyed, Asama fired a bunch of times to end it. The Student Council and Chancellor’s Officers showed up, but I think it was really over after Asama’s attack.”

“Agreed.” Her mother lifted her head from her hand. “Tomo-chan really has grown up.”

“How about you praise your daughter? She did good too.”

“*You* could have done a lot more. Don’t think I’m not familiar with Ootsubaki.”

“No, I couldn’t have.” Kimi waved her hands back and forth. “To go for a spell better than that, I need a proper backup band and instruments.”

“You don’t have one?”

“Heh heh. Everyone in my class dreams too big.”

“So they aren’t going to settle for backing up someone else, you mean? Of course you second years are busy. You’re all thinking about next year. So Kimi…”

“To take that thing on with nothing but a dance, I would need to reach high-level and gain permission to create my own spells.”

“I’ll pay for the exam, you know? I’m willing to support a kid who’s motivated.”

“Oh?”

Kimi pulled back a little, but…

“Oops.”

She straightened up when a presence approached from the side. Instead of just taking a natural pose that let her take action at any moment, she also relaxed her expression.

“Sorry about the wait,” said the presence next to her. “Here is your fried chicken and seasonal salad. And your mountain vegetable and kombu chazuke.”

“Mom… I’ve been meaning to ask. Is this really a bakery? If you’ve been lying about that, I’d like to know. So is this actually just a restaurant?”

“After running this place for so many years, my repertoire has gotten a little chaotic. But more importantly…”

Her mother then looked to the presence beside her.

It was an automaton in a sweater and apron. She had long silver hair and blue eyes. A waterproof and heat-resistant black material covered her body in places, but other than that, she was a lifelike model.

Kimi and her mother exchanged a glance, and…

“This is my daughter Kimi. …Do you recognize her?”

The automaton looked to Kimi. She took a single breath, stuck a finger in her right ear, and twisted it.

“I remember. She occasionally stops by here, but while running

along the roof as a group the other day, she shouted ‘Watch out, Asama!’ to Asama-sama, grabbed her from behind, and self-destructed together with her.”

“Oh, that was our PE class last week. Our teacher said it’s time for practical lessons outdoors since she’s more or less taught us how we’re supposed to fight. It was supposed to last until we reached Musashino’s stern, but we were all wiped out before even reaching Okutama’s bow. I can only laugh that the last of us was taken out in front of the graves.”

She remembered it well. After the vanguard had been taken out, Asama had readied her bow, but then the vanguard had flown right at her. She had been a good distance away, but according to Neshinbara, the vanguard had been sent flying into the rear guard without slowing their teacher down any.

“It all happened just as Asama prepared her bow, so it had to have taken some speed.”

“If Tomo-chan wasn’t fast enough, that teacher must be the real deal. I had guessed as much after the incident with Ishikawa-san, but hearing it from someone who actually lost to her is something else entirely.”

“I told you the day it happened too. Heh heh. It’s such an embarrassing story.”

“You did, but stories about your daughter’s embarrassing failures never get old. But Kimi, why don’t you head out to the front line?”

“I think it would suit me. Entertainer god musicians are meant to take the ‘middle ground’. But you know my foolish brother and I can’t head out to the front line.”

“Well, that’s true. Either Tenzou-kun and the others need to work a little harder or you need someone with more attack power on your vanguard. You seem a little lacking as you are,” said her mother. “Anyway, I think I received a divine transmission from home about that teacher. She’s from IZUMO and I’ve seen her spells, so I can take a good guess who taught her.”

The woman turned back to the automaton.

“Sorry for getting sidetracked. Do you remember anything else while looking at Kimi?”

“Judge. Other than what I just said, I sometimes see her at night playing with cats on the side of the road, carrying a lost Mouse to the shrine, or speaking with the black algae creatures.”

“Kimi, are you actually going the gap route?”

“Heh heh heh. A girl has to indiscriminately contact anything that’s cute!”

Kimi smiled when the automaton mimicked her thumb’s up.

Then the automaton turned toward her mother.

“But manager, I really do seem to have no memories from before arriving at Mikawa.”

Kimi mentally tilted her head at that.

“Have you checked whether she’s lost her memories or if her memories were just in their initial blank state? Where is she from?”

“Shockingly, I am of unknown origin and my first memory is being hungry in one of Tama’s streets.”

“The black algae noticed her and told me. I decided to give her something to eat and it turns out she’s lost her memories. The records say she arrived from Mikawa, though.”

Kimi’s mother lightly kicked her shin below the table.

Kimi knew what that meant: those records themselves were suspect.

Her mother had originally been a samurai who worked as a bodyguard. With this suspicious automaton, some human support was needed, but safety was also a concern. But…

“It’s been three months since Mikawa…but she wasn’t here when I

stopped by two weeks ago, was she?"

"Judge. At the manager's request, I was performing a number of tests. And I too wanted to know whether I, P-01s, am dangerous or not."

"Girls *can* be dangerous things. But what's that P-01s about?"

"Judge." The automaton nodded. "I suspect it is short for 'Panties-0ptional 1nterface System'."

"Mom! This girl! This girl is excellent! How about I adopt her as a little sister!?"

"Hmm, I had a feeling you two would get along."

Kimi and the automaton exchanged thumb's ups and Kimi asked something else.

"Is this why Toori's been coming?"

That question earned her another light kick to the shin.

…*What?*

Kimi briefly did not understand what her mother's shin contact meant.

But then P-01s tilted her head.

"Toori?"

"Eh? Oh, she means Wet Man."

"Oh, Wet Man. The one who drops a lot of spoons."

Kimi was a little confused, but apparently her younger brother was known as a mysterious peeping tom.

But then P-01s looked to the clock on the wall and bowed.

“Please visit us again, Kimi-sama. It is now time for me to clean the kitchen.”

“Judge. Heh heh. I look forward to visiting again, cute little automaton.”

Her words coincided with P-01s rising from her bow.

She started on the food while the automaton left. By the time the echoing footsteps continued into the kitchen, Kimi could taste the food. The salad made by the automaton had the vegetables laid out to fill all the gaps, the chazuke was the perfect temperature, and the fried chicken…

“…It’s bland?”

“Because she does it manually. When making an omelet, she uses her automaton load detection sensors to cook everything inside completely evenly. It was quite a surprise.”

That meant it was not actually bland. Every single part of it tasted exactly the same. From a flavor perspective, it was a lot like a drink in solid form.

Chicken was a fairly randomized ingredient, but the automaton had changed the density of the breading. She had strengthened its flavor where the flavor of the meat was weaker and weakened it where the original meat was stronger.

It showed excellent management, but…

“She must think deviations are a weakness, so everything comes out too perfectly and evenly managed. Unfortunately, ordering her to do it less carefully doesn’t work. To convince herself she’s being less careful, she goes a little too over the top.”

“Did Toori have to eat any of those ‘over the top’ ones?”

“He said, ‘What’s this!? Talk about new!’ ”

…He found a clever way out, didn’t he?

“Why are you in a bad mood, Kimi?”

“Heh heh. I’m not in a bad mood. I’m just not used to this.”

…Not used to it, hm?

For a certain reason, her brother had been avoiding this place, but now he was back. She was now certain of why, so it came down to whether she could accept it or not.

…Can I do that?

“Mom, as a big sister, would it be more interesting if I sulked, if I tried to show off in weird ways, or if I rooted for him?”

“It looks to me like you’re already accepting this pretty rationally.”

“Hmm. I know there’s a part of my relationship with that foolish brother that will never change and I’m not going to take that lightly now. …I don’t quite understand everything yet, but I can pretty much see how I hope it all turns out. So it really comes down to how I can have the most fun in all the twists, turns, and *ahahhhn*s in between.”

“And how do you hope it all turns out?”

“Heh heh. You want to know? …But I won’t tell you! I have a right to remain silent even with my own mother! Mom, why are you looking toward the counter? I know you hide a sword behind it, but what are you planning to do with it?”

“The details don’t matter. …If you can see the ending already and you know you can get there, then it probably would be fun to go along with all the twists and turns, whether that means sulking or whatever else.” Her mother smiled bitterly. “Besides, doing nothing isn’t an option, is it?”

“Judge. I know I’ll be better off down the road if I make sure to acknowledge this now. I can’t accept a ridiculous absence like in the past. Ever since then, I’ve been all for going on the attack and making your way to the best possible ending.”

A long time ago, she had received a large absence.

…*That's right.*

That was why.

She had been inexperienced back then. Now, she wanted to head in the more interesting direction. And that was why she thought about what was going to happen. Instead of an away game, their everyday life would be an extreme home game.

In that case, she thought.

"It might not always be fun, but I'll trust in and worry for my foolish brother while also pouting and adoring him."

She made up her mind and continued eating. The chazuke had gone cold and the rice was beginning to soak up the tea, but that made it seem nice and homemade. She munched on the evenly flavored fried chicken as she said something more.

"Everyday life isn't even at all. Oh, and…"

"Yes?"

"I'm sure you know, but I've already made up my mind about that automaton girl. …My lost little sister has returned in a new form. God does some strange things."

"I see," said her mother while standing from her seat. "Don't tell anyone about that. A few have already caught on, though."

"What about you?"

"This isn't about my generation. And I'm not absolutely certain. So…she's an automaton working part-time here. Sometimes I do wonder, but I don't mind if it never goes beyond that. I'll stick with it as is."

"Judge."

Kimi raised her left hand and her mother struck it with her own left

hand.

“You don’t hold back,” said Kimi with a bitter smile as she started thinking about how to pout beginning tomorrow.

“Hm? A divine mail from Asama?”

She stopped eating and looked at the sign frame.

“ ‘Meet me below the academy bridge tomorrow morning.’ …Is she planning to confess to me?”

Asama walked to the Asama Shrine on the Musahi’s surface at night.

She could not see the sky due to the stealth barrier.

She could view this as normal for the Musashi.

But she also felt like her body temperature was higher than usual.

It may have been due to stopping by the bathhouse or because she had failed to regulate her breathing.

She was not sure.

But despite not knowing, her step was light. Instead of her body pressing down on the soles of her feet, she felt like the tips of her toes were pulling her forward.

And…

“The sky.”

She muttered those words, but…

…*No.*

So she opened her lips again.

“To the sky.”

That isn't it either, she thought.

What was wrong with it? What was not fitting?

She did not know that either, but she vaguely knew what she was doing.

"In the sky."

She spoke.

"The stars."

No.

"The moons."

That seems to fit, but it's a little much.

So…

"The usual."

She spoke.

"Night."

She spoke.

"I can't see it."

No. Not seeing it is normal. I can't make that seem tragic.

So…

"I see it."

But…

"I…"

No. I'm the one speaking, so it has to be more than just "me".

So…

“My will.”

That’s too strict. I’m going back to my old self! It can’t be my will. Um…

“_____”

She hesitated, but she said it.

“My heart…”

She was not sure if she should say that, but she still exposed a small bit of herself with her words. But…

“Yes.”

Her body was moving forward, so she spoke.

“…won’t stop.”

She moved her body forward. More than stepping forward, she seemed pulled forward by something ahead of her. And…

“In the sky.”

Hangs.

“The usual.”

Empty.

“Night.”

And.

“I see it.”

But.

“My heart.”

For some reason.

“Won’t stop.”

She moved her posture forward.

She hummed with the tempo of her walking feet.

“In the sky is the usual night. I see it and my heart won’t stop.”

She did not know what she was trying to say.

But she knew this was the right answer at the moment.

She might wonder what she had been thinking by the following day, but it was the right thing for her current heated mood.

…*This is what I am right now.*

So she accepted it.

“How about I do it?”

Yes.

“How about I sing?”

Asama continued forward.

She walked forward below the usual night.

“Before…”

Before it had been Gagaku.

Gagaku was still a part of her work.

She had often thought that she would continue doing it forever.

But…

“Now…”

Now things had changed.

Those thoughts had not been wrong, but things had changed.

She walked below the usual white sky of the night. That closed sky cut off her view of the stars and the moons.

But all sorts of things existed beyond that sky.

That was not something to be thinking after all this time.

She had seen that sky so often in the past.

She had grown up on the Musashi, so she had been familiar with it before entering elementary school.

They felt this life on the Musashi would give them long lives.

Some would leave for the surface for a variety of reasons. Asama was planning to travel around the mainland training after graduating and Mito had said something similar.

But in the end, they would return here. So…

“It’s the usual scenery.”

Nothing changed.

It all stayed the same.

It would stay that way forever.

“How am I supposed to look at it differently?”

In fact, could she even do that?

She did not know.

Shrine maidens worked with the power of words. They defined things and purified away the excess.

She had been doing that all her life, so her view of things tended to be strict.

…*Yes.*

She knew she was strict. She knew she had always been that way.

With music, she had not tried to learn about any other kind and had avoided coming into contact with anything new or foreign.

But now…

“I’m different.”

Her words sounded almost like a hope.

“I am different, aren’t I?”

She wanted to find out whether she was or not.

…I’m not sure I like that this was all started by a strange invitation from Toori-kun, though.

But she did have someone who directed her interests and gave her a place to answer those interests.

So…

“It depends on whether my destiny wants to go in that direction.”

The others had not noticed that she wanted to see whether she had changed or not.

Of course, he might have noticed an early sign of this.

But the rest was up to her.

So…

“_____”

She continued forward and thought.

“If I do change and it fits within my proper destiny…”

She viewed the usual scenery around her.

“Will I see something that hasn’t changed yet looks different to me?”

Afterword

Now, this begins the bonus novel Kimitoasamade. I can only do this thanks to all of your support. Thank you very much.

This isn't really a spinoff or a prequel. It's really just following the usual gang before the big change in Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon. It will follow Asama as the Gagaku Band named Kimitoasamade is born, the others will think about what they want to do with themselves, and they'll decide on a path and get into some conflicts. Instead of being the entrance to the main series, this is more like the stairway leading up to that entrance. I hope you can see what Asama and the others were like a year before and see what happened then.

At a year before the main series, everyone is still lacking in strength. Even Asama's arrows are wea-…well, let's not be ridiculous. Anyway, monsters are showing up, a girl with a bow is the protagonist, and her party includes a werewolf and a dancer. In other words, this is an orthodox fantasy story.

Since this is a bonus included with the anime, I guess I should discuss that too. Things got pretty crazy right away with Episode 1 included in this volume. Just how much are they going to move? They even included Naito and Naruze's attack as well as Adele and Hassan's charge which were cut from the novel for space. As the original author, I have nothing to complain about. I am thankful to the staff and everyone else involved. They're putting in a ton of work.

Now for a chat with a friend.

"How do you like the Ho-nime?"

"Don't let this go to your head."

"That's the first thing you have to say!?"

"I've only seen the first episode, but am I right in thinking the

teacher and the odd-eyed girl are the heroines?”

“Wow, now that’s a new reaction. I need to write that one down… Also, do you have any memories about Sunrise anime?”

“Hmm, the first theatrical anime I went to see had a decapitation at the very beginning. I didn’t like anime for a while after that.”

“Oh, dear. What an ominous beginning for this first volume.”

Now, my BGM while working was Star Festival. I was kindly given the data while proofreading, so I got the rare experience of working to the music sung in the novel itself. In fact, I’m having that experience right now. What am I supposed to do about this reality? I think I’m going to work even harder.

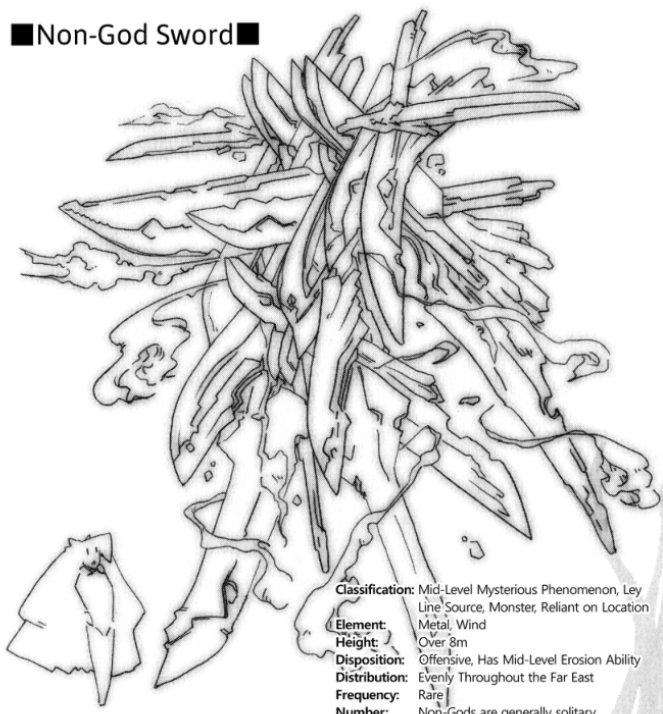
Anyway, the next bonus novel comes with Volume 3 in two months. Volume 2 comes with a special CD by Naito and Naruze. Wait just a bit longer for both of those.

October 2011. A rainy morning that was supposed to be sunny.

-Kawakami Minoru

Setting

■Non-God Sword■

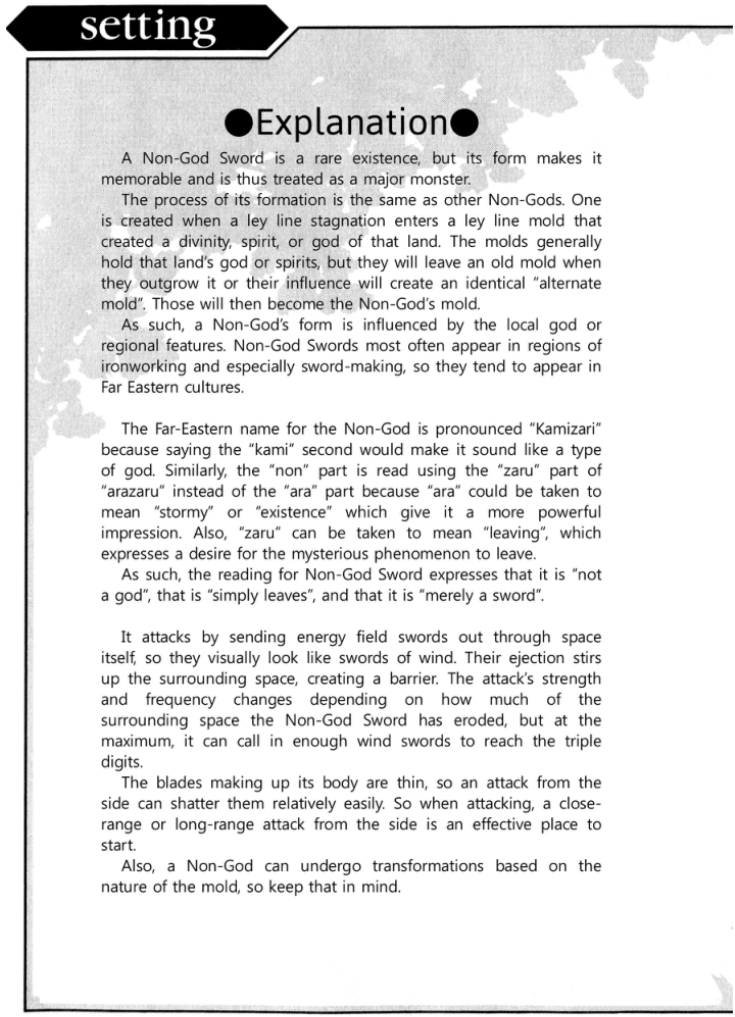


Classification: Mid-Level Mysterious Phenomenon, Ley Line Source, Monster, Reliant on Location
Element: Metal, Wind
Height: Over 8m
Disposition: Offensive, Has Mid-Level Erosion Ability
Distribution: Evenly Throughout the Far East
Frequency: Rare
Number: Non-Gods are generally solitary

A Non-God Sword has a humanoid form with a torso and legs made from swords and blades, but without a face or arms. Unlike a divinity or spirit with thoughts of its own, it is simply a stagnation and has no head when formed inside its mold. This also means it cannot acquire any abilities or decisions beyond its "sword" texture, so a Non-God Sword cannot have a texture beyond swords.

However, it does use a divine mold, so Non-Gods tend to have a wing-like shape.

In the Non-God Sword's case, it has a blade-like texture on the front of its body, but a texture of broken swords seem to have rusted together into wing-like shapes on its back. This form is why some regions view a Non-God Sword as a messenger of god's wrath.


setting
●Explanation●
A Non-God Sword is a rare existence, but its form makes it memorable and is thus treated as a major monster.
The process of its formation is the same as other Non-Gods. One is created when a ley line stagnation enters a ley line mold that created a divinity, spirit, or god of that land. The molds generally hold that land's god or spirits, but they will leave an old mold when they outgrow it or their influence will create an identical "alternate mold". Those will then become the Non-God's mold.
As such, a Non-God's form is influenced by the local god or regional features. Non-God Swords most often appear in regions of ironworking and especially sword-making, so they tend to appear in Far Eastern cultures.
The Far-Eastern name for the Non-God is pronounced "Kamizari" because saying the "kami" second would make it sound like a type of god. Similarly, the "non" part is read using the "zaru" part of "arazaru" instead of the "ara" part because "ara" could be taken to mean "stormy" or "existence" which give it a more powerful impression. Also, "zaru" can be taken to mean "leaving", which expresses a desire for the mysterious phenomenon to leave.
As such, the reading for Non-God Sword expresses that it is "not a god", that is "simply leaves", and that it is "merely a sword".
It attacks by sending energy field swords out through space itself, so they visually look like swords of wind. Their ejection stirs up the surrounding space, creating a barrier. The attack's strength and frequency changes depending on how much of the surrounding space the Non-God Sword has eroded, but at the maximum, it can call in enough wind swords to reach the triple digits.
The blades making up its body are thin, so an attack from the side can shatter them relatively easily. So when attacking, a close-range or long-range attack from the side is an effective place to start.
Also, a Non-God can undergo transformations based on the nature of the mold, so keep that in mind.

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Notes

1. ↑ Manko means vagina.